

Prologue

A sound that resembles the dazzling gleam from ornamental lighting reverberated in my ears. This is the fifth time already so I am already well accustomed to it.

I unconsciously furrowed my eyebrows, bit on my lips, and painfully clasped my hands together. I'm sure anybody who sees me now would be overwhelmed with humiliation and profound grief.

In reality, I feel not the slightest sorrow, and really feel that it has finally ended.
“Why..... Why has this happened!!”

While thinking, I released an unexpected hysterical scream. Wow, I didn't know that even I had such an amazing hot-temper. My mouth started to move against my will, murmuring “why” repeatedly, despite the air that was filled with happiness, it gave off an ominous feeling. So horrifying.

“..... Mariabell”

Mariabell. That is my name.

A handsome boy with slightly long platinum blonde hair and golden eyes looked at me and opened his mouth.

“Mariabell, my apologies. I like Karen.”
“Ugh.....!!”

There is 3 more seconds before the shocked me would run away from here.
And it would be another 7 seconds before everything takes a turn for the worse.

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“LinaLia” – the title of a romance fantasy Otome game. This world is a swords and magic world, where various trials have to be overcome to build romantic relationships.

The setting is at the Avant Thor Magic Campus. This super celebrity school is for people such as those with royal blood, the son of an artist or rich people. The game starts from the transfer of a rural plebeian heroine with a rare talent to such a school.

There are 5 targets for capture. One is a teaching staff, two are Senpais, another one is a Douhai and the last one is a Kouhai, so that it is more fun due to the balance of romance targets to choose from. Of course, all of them can be considered attractive. Their 2D specs are simply too sick.

The story unfolds with the romance between the heroine Karen Fleur with the disgustingly high-specs princelings.

The golden straight bob, the marine eyes that gives the impression of the deep sea and transparent-like white skin. This beautiful girl is unquestionably the epitome of cuteness.

She was kind and quiet, a girl that was cheerful and positive but was slow in matters relating to romance and can be considered an extinct species. In addition, she has a rare ability of “Reinforcement Magic”, and can hold the title of a heroine that gives a sense of relief and stability.

The characters in “LinaLia” seem to be very common and even the targets share a common romantic theme.

Even the title LinaLia is from the languages of flowers.
“Please be aware of this love.”

It might be a bit difficult to understand so I would explain it specifically and clearly. This game’s romantic theme is “One-sided love that is not allowed”.

There are individual routes for the 5 different capture targets and it is possible to become a fiancée after getting approval from parents.

The fiancée’s name is Mariabell Tempest.

She has a soft, violet and wavy long hair. She also have pastel purple eyes and eyelashes that seem to extend such that they form a continuous border on her face. Her smooth white skin that is likened to be white porcelain, her tiny face and her delicate and lovely curves from her silhouette. She has used all the 2D heroine privileges without holding back and has become a divine beauty I think.

This heroine’s sweet face is loved by all but really, it is a 120% evil face and I wonder if this story would be told from her perspective.

Well then, I have spoken for too long and it is time to get down to the main topic. I think it is likely that a huge majority of you all can predict how this will start out.

I am now in the world of “LinaLia”.
As the villainess – Mariabell Tempest.

Chapter 1: Good afternoon, baby

In any case, the first round was surprising.

When I first opened up my eyes, I found myself abruptly in the senior high school entrance ceremony, furthermore the building for the ceremony was luxurious and gorgeous and I doubt any human can keep up with such a development. The confusion inside of me went past the stage of madness, but thinking back now, my expression and actions back then were still acceptable.

If the truth about me was discovered, I'll probably be given the nickname of degenerated woman. I hate that.

In the second round, I was earnestly praying that all this was a dream but my heart knew the chance of my wish not coming true is 99.9%. I cried while time flew by.

From the third round onwards, it had become real serious.

After all, no matter what actions I do, even if I dislike it, I am still unable to achieve anything. It is all because I can't move and talk according to how I want to. This is what it means to be in auto-mode.

I had obtained this completely automatic body before I even knew what was going on. Not cool.

And now, the fifth round is coming to an end.

I could no longer hear anything; my eyes weren't close but my vision became all dark instantly.

Several seconds later, I opened up my eyes and saw the same old scene – the senior high school entrance ceremony.

“.....?”

The vision that reflected into me as I opened my eyes was the pastel pink ceiling.

Wait, what? I should be in the gymnasium right now according to the current development.

“Maria-chan, have you woken up?”

“.....”

The voice that reached my ears while I was still in bewilderment was not a cheeky male voice, neither was it the calm voice of a female. It was a lovely and gentle female voice that I was very familiar with.

Next, I saw a hand holding on the handrails near me. From gazing at her well-trimmed fingernails, I slowly shifted my vision upwards.

A pair of pastel purple eyes. Big and round eyes that gave a childish impression. The elaborate hair accessories that were on her casually plaited golden hair were a perfect fit for her. The score for her

face would net incredible ratings and while this might be a mass produced 2D face, it is makes her a super cute girl.

But..... who is she? I haven't seen this person in the five rounds I have experienced.

“Maria-chan, start changing your clothes once you have fully woken okay?”

“.....!!?”

As she said that, I realised my hands were full. While I was still in chaos, I had slowly lifted myself up, and understood where I was.

From the colour of the ceiling, I had guessed that the walls would be pastel pink in colour too. The windows leading to the balcony had a roundness that made them cute. There was a cabriole table with a white design giving it a refined and high class feeling. And of course, the baby crib canopy.

Yep, a “baby” crib canopy.

Of course that was where I was sleeping on earlier.

Chapter 2: In a pinch all of a sudden

I am Mariabell Tempest. I have become 3 years old.

This development is too fast? There is nothing much to talk about of an infant's daily life ... or more like there is a full load of things I don't want to say. You got a problem with that?

Two days in and I was yearning for the automatic life so much so that my heart broke. I fully understood that humans can't die from shame. If I had the abilities to wound myself due to shame, there is no mistake I would've killed myself. Rather, I am 80% serious about that.

The inside of me is a person that has gone through life all the way to 2nd year high school student 5 times, totaling that up would mean that I am already an Obaa-san. I'm only given 1 year every round so that adds up to 5 years only though. My mental age is independent of my age so, I have the exact same circumstances with a certain you-know-who primary school kid detective. Not happy.

And I have did not take into account other factors. I did not voice any objections. As a result of being unable to assert any and everything, I have perfected my ignoring skills. Not happy.

Let's return to the story. The first thing the three year old me did was to start writing and recording as much as I can remember.

Now that the auto-mode function is no longer active, making careless mistakes would either destroy (dead) me or kill (dead) me. What kind of stupid game kills me all the time, god damn, I wanna sell this shit game right now.

The title of this game is "LinaLia" and was named from the language of flowers. It is an Otome game where you can have fun building a relationships with partners and get married. There are 5 capture targets in total.

Now for the cast of the game, members of the Avant Thor magic academy, the second prince of the Craine Kingdom, 『Runa Vi Leonova』.

『Sashia Dorothy』, a thoroughbred who has the world's best flame wizard as his grandfather.

『Tuvalu Miranda』, the son of the Miranda marquis who is currently acting as the prime minister of the king.

『Niel Juliano』, the youngest child of Count Juliano who works in foreign affairs.

By clearing the four of them, the lock on the secret character, school staff 『Greyest Fannie Sandria』 would be unlocked.

Of course they are all beautiful ikemens on parade. They are at the top of the pack, and can make a living just by standing. Your eyes would be crushed if you even dare to directly look into their eyes.

The only information about 『Karen Fleur』 that I have is that she comes from a humble background and that she uses reinforcement magic. Racking my brains over the past 5 rounds, I still can't recall any

other information apart from the fact that Mariabell hated her a lot.

And now, 『Linalia』's main villain. A heroine, shouldering one of the most important role and introduced alongside with the characters, it is I, Mariabell Tempest.

The only daughter of the duke of the Craine Kingdom. I have yet to have spoken about information relating to her mom, so anyways, when Mariabell was around 5 years old, her mom broke up with her dad, and it seems like the father took child custody. As the only daughter and not having a mother around her, to ensure that she does not become too lonely, her father showered her with love and pampered her. She was treated as though she was the only sunshine of his life. My heart couldn't help but be drawn in to that.

To be doted upon a father that would could go through hell and high waters for her sake, venture into the deepest abyss, there was absolutely no way Mariabell could grow up to have a decent personality.

『Not interested because they are plebs』 said the Heroine. That borders on a crime wait, crime? What shit can you do if the traces were erased? This is the mind-set needed to defeat bullies (TN: or helpless victims). When 『The person I like has arrived』, she would freely use her father's money, connections and authority to become married to that person. The selfish, self-centred and unscrupulous lady is complete. To fall in to ruins (dead) or to die (dead) is just getting the deserts she deserves. When I was in complete auto-mode, I was literally rolling up in laughter and that it serves her right.

However, to the current me, this is a matter of life and death. Bullying, is a no-no. An engagement without love is rejected too.

Under the current circumstances, I have to be careful. I won't bullying the commoners. Even if I really like a person, I wouldn't force the person into it.

But, what if my auto-mode returned?

Even if I can move and speak, there is no guarantee that this will remain so. Considering that the past 5 rounds were all auto-mode actually.

What happens if she is pampered, gets carried away and starts acting all selfish again? What's waiting ahead is simply her destruction (dead) or death (dead), there is no live (alive) route after that in this shit game.

And then what if, in her vilest moment, the auto-mode is switched off again?

While noting down the possibilities at length, I became more aware of what could go wrong.

The thing that I need to do first is to crush the flags and not prepare for life after getting rekted.

[..... I need to change the family and living environment or else!]

In the event that I'm back to the auto-mode, Mariabell will not be on the path of ruining her life, not becoming a distorted soul, and be close to a heroine..... ok, it doesn't need to go that far, just an

environment that ensures she picks up the basic moral values.

I shall nip the buds of why Mariabell Tempest ended out to become a selfish, self-centred and unscrupulous lady.

That is the number one thing that I have to do, now that I have finally regained the ability to assert myself.

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To improve the environment, the first thing to consider is the problems of her parents.

Mariabell became selfish because her father spoiled her, and the cause for that is her parents' break up, is the first problem for me.

Why, did the two of them break up in the first place?

For the past 5 rounds, I believed the reason for divorce was her mother.

Reason being that her father loved her mom very much.

Her father named her 『Mariabell』 based on the names of 『Virgin Mary』 and her mom 『Belldelia』.

One of the reasons for Mariabell being excessively pampered was the divorce. Nevertheless, her father doted on her because Mariabell had the identical facial features with her mom, such as her pastel purple eyes. In my opinion, the spoiling is inevitable since his daughter had similar characteristics to the very person he loved.

Apart from ensuring that his daughter was not lonely after the divorce, maybe he himself wanted to alleviate his loneliness by pampering his daughter.

Naturally, such a father couldn't have initiated the divorce.

Therefore, it is highly probable the person to have suggested the divorce is the mother. So I deduce without concrete evidence though.

「…… Umm, Okaa-sama is」

「Madam is tired now」

「……. I see」

The maid replied bluntly.

Yet I was given nearly the same reply every day for this week. It seems my Okaa-sama is considerably busy. By the way, Otou-sama, who should be the head of the family, comes in to say Ohaiyou daily without fail though. Why the heck would the wife be even busier than the backbone of the family.

Despite the maid taking care of me and handling the household …… Okaa-sama, do you have a lot of hobbies? That's bullshit.

「What's happening man (or woman).....」

Is meeting with your mom even such a difficult task? When was the last time that she interacted with Mariabell I wonder there are really so few though!

As soon as I weaned off breastmilk, the maid became the one to take care of me. From then on, the interactions with Okaa-sama decreased significantly, even now I can't meet her nor converse with her. Can't even see her face once in the entire weekare we even parent and child?

Despite gaining my freedom and being able to walk on my own

Before the both of them break up when I am 5 years old, would I be able to find the reason behind it and resolve it?

No matter what, I am just a 3 years old toddler. "Please don't break up —!" I could make a racket with that and could possibly achieve something but, making my move without understanding the symptoms, the furthest I can go is to get them to break into laughter.

「The current situation is far worse than I initially thought.....」

"I have my 5 rounds of memories and I surely can work something out." Should I really be that optimistic? Ahh, I'm already yearning for auto-mode.....

Chapter 3: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing is not easy [1]

Well, my optimism in life was destroyed in a few days, I could not move forward without struggling.

In the greenhouse where the colorful roses are in full bloom, I sat while agonizing.

I noticed.Rather than ignoring it I wanted to pretend not to see, but I was working hard in front of them to my very limit.

Although they probably only see a normal three year old child, unfortunately I am not a normal, straightforward and pure 3-year old infant.

So, thank you very much. I would've been happy if I did not notice it, but I did.

I....I do not like being avoided by the servants!

The damage dealt to me when I realized it was great. My heart was devastated.

By the way, in the ending, Mariabell Tempest was hated by all the school students, those who were once were with her, had all turned against her and felt she got what she deserved.....It was funny since at the time I was fully automatic, but if it were to come to me it would be completely intolerable.

Moreover, she was clinging onto the captured target.....shame on top of embarrassment.

It is a "dark history" I would not like to recall.

That was the overall story. Anyways, I am disliked by the servants.

However, mentally I am an adult but I am only three years old (in terms of looks), there is no way that I have any ill intention nor any ill-intent.

You will be fired.

That father who showers his daughter with love is unlikely to be silent.

Then why did you notice? Why?

「 ” Ano, some water ——” 」

「 Please wait a moment ojōsama 」

「Thank you 」

And?

「 The hair is a little... 」

「 I will tie it now, ojōsama 」

And?

「 Ano —— 」

「What is it, ojōsama?」

And?

There are many other things, but the problem is that they do not have any expression.

As expected, all the servants are beautiful because they are from an Otome game, but they are the scary kind of beauty.

Moreover, since they are monotonous in their tone, it is unnecessary.

What are they all emotionless?

Besides it is not only that.

「Ano, Okaa-sa——」

「Ojōsama, Madam is busy right now」

Every time I try to talk to Okaa-sama, every time they get in the way!

Saying she is busy is a lie isn't it? Normally she would be in her room! Stop getting in the way of Parent-child communication!

「...Hard」

Why do you have to make it such a pain to talk with Okaa-sama.

I must speak with Okaa-sama soon and I have to find out the cause of the divorce!

「...it should've been easy, yet」

Before when I was still an infant, the Okaa-sama who took care of me was kind and was pretty and came to love me in an instant.

I remember when she made me laugh, the anger and tiredness within me would fade.

Well, the meal times were something close to torture, but...Yes, lets not remember.

The reason that mother and father divorced.

The reason that caused the person who loved her husband and daughter to have left the House.

I cannot imagine. No, I have no idea at all.

「What could the reason have been when there was nothing wrong?」

The circumstances of the house, the circumstances of the couple, but none of them makes sense because information on the characters is too little.

In the past five rounds, Mariabell was completely indifferent to her mother, so there is no info on her mother in the game and even her name is not mentioned.

Of course, because there is no character design, I knew the face of Mariabell's mother for the first time in my sixth round, or actually now my mother's face.

In other words, I have no preliminary knowledge like capture targets, heroines, and my father who actually participated in the past five rounds.

In order to stop the divorce of my parents who can be said to be the first barriers, information on only the father's side is insufficient, or rather if there is no information on the mother side, it cannot start.

So at any rate I would like to talk to my mother and get information.

「Or I would to say, but I cannot meet you!」

Back to the drawing board. Un, it does not start till I meet you after all!

I thought out loud unintentionally. It is about time that my stress is reaching its limit.

As a Duke's daughter, you should not do inelegant things like raise both hands and shouting in frustration, but this is okay.

This rose garden is a place I found walking around the mansion after I got tired from the day to day etiquette and decided to take a stroll.

At the beginning I was nervous if there were any “nōmen[2]” maids perhaps hiding around in here somewhere, but nowadays I am use to the place and just sit on chair in “Taiikuzuware[3]” style.

When I think about it, It would be sad to allow it to continue disturbing me.

「...my ears, they hurt」

「What ...?!??」

Like I said it is not necessary to mind because there is only me here.

But there was a person. This is bad. Currently I am completely relaxed.

How long have I been sitting on the chair like this?

Technically speaking I am full grown woman with all the feminal appeals but now I am a 3-year old child. This situation is too surreal.

「E~a...from now, since when ...」

「I was here first」

「Well, that....」

In other words, I was seen from the beginning.

And for the grand soliloquy.

I shifted in my chair from a “Taiikuzuware” style to an “Indian style”.

May I cry?

[...I showed you an unsightly sight, I am sorry, again]

There is no meaning even if I keep it up now, but there is little information to assume a defiant attitude.

First.....who is this boy?

I am the sole child in Tempest House, as for the servants they are single, and for those that have children have already left the household.

So there is only one child, or suppose to be one child in the household.

But there is a child seemingly the same age as me currently in front of me.

An angelic-like boy with brown eyes and smooth wavy royal milk tea hair. He looks familiar to me from the eye and hair color, but that smooth straight hair makes me feel a little jealous.

Is it weird to say that I would like to dress him up in a maid outfit.

The effect would be outstanding.

But...anyways who is this?

It is at least not one of capture target. Both the hair and the eyes are different in a color.

[I am Mariabell Tempest, the daughter of this house. Who are you and what are you here for?]

To declare myself in such a fashion is rather impertinent of me if I do say so myself. Hardly the remark a 3-year old child should be making to someone in their first meeting.

But I want you to excuse me. I am Mariabell Tempest after all.

I don't mean as a villain, but I am in a position where the corresponding behavior is obligatory, whether as I am Mariabell Tempest, a young lady of the Tempest family even if I am only three years old.

Even though, I have been living in auto-mode all the time.

My ego has already been established in the auto-mode even though I am now Mariabell.

I cannot become the duke's daughter by just saying my heart and soul is Mariabell now. I will appeal with personality denial if compelled.

Of course, even so, I do not think that I can pass the responsibility or abandon it either.

I am not really being hypocritical as I did play as Mariabell five times in the past enough to have her personality down to the pat.

Although it is a bit problematic for me to be able to impersonate her personality so well. It was a little late to notice now though.

[I want to be alone now. Can you leave?]

Please, do not let me increase my “dark history” any more.

「…… A strange way of talking」

Thank you for the straight-forward remark.

Children are honest.

But you will not be popular if you tell a girl she is strange!

「You did not speak normally, it was normal when you were alone」

「…After all, I heard you」

Though I had the faintest hope, it was crushed into a thousand pieces.

「You couldn’t see, anyone? 」

「……………」

「Anyone? 」

Do not be so frank; this child.

It will not be such a thing of much interest.

Though I should show it in a manner when I did not want to answer, I have given in to a boy without so much of a fight」 Children’s 『” Why?” Attack』 is too pure and difficult to avoid.

「….. mother」

「Mother …… is it yours?」

「Yes, my mother. We can hardly talk because she is too busy」

It is quite doubtful whether she is really busy. When I went to see her again today, the “nōmen” maids once again got in my way and I was not able to even see mother’s face.

「….. is it possible you do not want to see me」

Perhaps my mother does not want to see me.

It was something that I knew in the corner of my heart all the time but had been continually looking away.

We cannot meet because the other person does not want to meet. It would be most natural to think so.

I had tried to visit her many times to no avail, I thought of many other possibility, but in the end the obvious conclusion was that my mother will not see me.

Neither the servants nor father are busy or tired, but they will not let me see you.

And my mother will not come to see me.

I believe the relationship between a mother and her single daughter is important, I only want to see you, and I will go see her.

Though presently I want to meet mother for an important purpose, but in reality....even if it is the real three-year old Mariabell, I'm sure she is missing her mother.

3-years old is an age where one wants to be spoiled by both the mother and father a lot.

No matter how much my father loves me, for a daughter, her mother is a special existence and I want a clear love from my mother.

「It may be that it is only me who wants to meet」

The more I think about it, the more it seems like a fact. It is only me that wants to see the feelings of parent and child. I cannot help but think so.

I wonder if her gentle look was just my illusion. I'd like to think that it is not so, but I do not have any basis for my judgement.

I, so to speak, have come to a deadlock. Although it is a hurdle I need to overcome, I do not know what lies ahead of it and how it will change.

I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach.

What surfaced was a voice that was all too blank.

「Then you should just ask and it'll all be good」

「Huh...?」

「You should just ask your mother whether she likes you or not」

[1] 猫かぶり “Nekokaburi” Essentially means Wolf in sheep's clothing. This is a Japanese term so there is not really a direct translation, I had to make title from a very literally meaning.

[2] sitting on the floor grasping one's knees (as in a gym class)

[3] Japanese noh mask

Chapter 4: There is no such thing as difficult in the beginning

It is such an easy task, his eyes seem to say when he looks at me. Rather yet his eyes seem to say why not do so in the first place.

If I don't know then ask. If I do not understand, you can tell me.

The suggestion was such a simple concept, yet I did not think about it at all. Even though it is simple..... No, as it was easy, the answer that could not be derived from a normal sense of values.

I am not exaggerating when I say it is quite serious. This is essentially a possible death flag!

「Fu fu~tsu」

「..... what's with you」

I was delighted and unintentionally let out a smile which made the boy edge back as if saying that I was weird.

Though I was surprise by it, judging from his reaction I do not think it was a good idea that I laughed so suddenly. However, because I am glad right now I will let it slide.

「Thank you」

「.....? 」

「Okay! Then I will be going」

「Farewell boy! 」

「E——」

The world seems a little clearer to me now I wonder if it is because the tension was going up.

I could hear the boy saying something in the background, but I picked up the hem of my dress a little and started running, the graceful Duke's daughter Mariabell was nowhere to be seen.

Before being the Duke's daughter, I am a little 3-year old girl.

While holding the hem of my dress in my tiny hands, I dashed desperately at the full speed my short legs could carry me.

The direction? That is, of course mother's room.

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「Anne, mother's room?」

I ask one of the “nōmen” maids ‘Anne’ who suddenly appeared from nowhere about mother's room.

Of course prepare both the dress and the hair a little before attacking, right?

I don't exactly know where and how Anne suddenly appeared from, but I do not care because I have other matters on my mind.

If you care or mind about it, you lose, so the best option would be to ignore it.

「Yes, that's rightojōsama, okusama is..」

「I do not mind」

I interrupted Anne's answer and knocked on the door of my mother's room.

I can imagine what Anne will say from my past experiences. I am busy or I am tired, whether it is a lie or not will be used to keep me away from here for reasons that I do not know.

In fact, the knock actually made her “nōmen” expression change for the first time.

I guess it was unexpected, that the voice of the young ojōsama sounded so impatient.

There was feeling.....No, I guess it is natural, but I was doubtful of the long unpleasant silence.

「Mother, it is Mariabell, may I come in?」

「... Maria-chan?」

「I am coming in」

「Ojōsama——」

I opened the door quickly before Anne could stop me.

There were some manner issues regarding my conduct just like before when I knocked.

But I have to act quickly before I can be stopped.

If I don't push forward now then I will not be able to proceed, the plan that I got from the boy even if it is a little rough around the edges is my best option and chance right now.

As I opened the door and entered inside, I saw a woman with a surprised expression on her face sitting on a chair near the window with a book resting on her knee.

It's been a while..... though it is a little strange, she is my mother.

The room was gorgeous and luxurious but at the same felt slightly mismatched, it is more accurate to say that it had a neat atmosphere rather than refined.

The eyes of pastel purple which looked around at me were the same as the ones from my memories.

「Pardon my intrusion, okāsama」

「Maria-chan ...what is the matter?」

She seems to be considerably surprised by the sudden visit.

From a parent-child relationship view that is a problematic reaction, but it is a normal reaction if I think about our exchange up till now.

I picked up the hem of my dress lightly and lower my head.

It is the minimum courtesy that should be shown for someone who just forced herself into the room without approval.

Although I am not in a position to talk about courtesy at this point, I am still going through that part.

I am only a small little three-year old, and I plan to use my young age to my advantage.

Though it is difficult to say what I want to say.

But I will go for it, even if it kills me. I must try my hardest and use my advantage to the maximum.

I cannot be hesitant if I make up my mind to do so. I stared at the eyes of mother, and opened my mouth.

「I, have a question to ask okāsama」

「Ma~a....I wonder what it could be?」

「Okāsama.....do you dislike me?」

「What ...!?」

I said it. I bit my tongue a little, but I suppose it counts as a pass.

Since I am a three year old, there is no problem even if the words cannot be pronounced smoothly. The contents are heavy this time so it is more important that I got them out than having messed up a bit.

From being asked such a sudden question from her daughter...my mother stared wide-eyed at the remark

A look of surprise and sadness from what I can tell, it was that kind of expression.

Judging from the expression, I am not disliked ... right? If that is what your expression means, it is a nice result for me

「Why.....I do not dislike you, to say such a thing」

「If not, then why did you not come and see me?」

Yes, just to not get ahead of myself and get my hopes up.

Even if I come to meet you, you will not see me.

Even if I cannot meet you, you will not come to see me.

Apparently I seem to have been more stressed than I realized myself.

It was unexpected, but it hurt my heart more than I imagined, my mother's expression makes me very frustrated.

If you do not dislike me, why will you not see me?

You will not come and see me.

Do not make such a sorrowful face, do not look so sad, I did not do anything.

To try and meet, to try and talk, you did not try to do any of these.

Only I became so desperate, while you were only waiting. Even so, stop looking like you are in so much pain by yourself.

「It was more painful for me, much more than you!!」

「Ma-, ria, ... Maria-chan」

「It was lonely and painful, but it was only me, Maria¹ worked so hard, and was so hurt, but okāsama did not notice at all!」

What a terrible tantrum.

Considering my mental age, it is a violent sight, but because I am a child it can be tolerated.

To the me who justed cried out, mother seems about to cry too.

To cry to release my pent-up feelings, to make mother understand, that may have been my “real intention” all the time.

For me I realized for the first time... No, it's ‘Mariabell’s’ intention.

The feelings of myself and the 3-year old Mariabell, who is the true owner of this body are mixed, and it turns into one voice and steadily flows out from my mouth.

「Maria, loves okāsama so much....there are so many things I want to tell okāsama....but, when Maria thinks okāsama might hate her, it was so hard and painful」

Do not avoid me, do not hate me because I love you.

I wonder if these were the feelings of the real three-year old Mariabell.

In the same way as me, you were being avoided by your mother.

And so, I could not help but also feel your unease.

Because unlike me, the original Mariabell was a genuine three-year old child.

She was worried and felt uneasy, but surely Mariabell did not confess it, and her mother without worrying about her daughter’s anxiety.....chose divorce.

I do not know the reason, perhaps my mother did not want it.

But for Mariabell it is a decisive event that transforms her insecurity into confirmation.

I was hated.

My beloved mother did not love me.

It was painful and sad but she was disliked.

With nowhere to turn to and without thinking she chose to become indifferent to the matter.

I had always thought why there was no information in the past five rounds. But the fact that it was the most sad reason was not within my expectations.

It seems the cause for her future evil personality was not just being plain spoiled.

Because it is not a pretty sight to be tolerated, so it could only be thought as “It serves you right” for the past five rounds.

「That feeling, I also thought...」

「What.....」

「..... Sorry, Maria-chan」

My breathing out of sync from excessive crying, and a watery nose.

As a young lady, and a girl before that, I was desperately trying to suppress my runny nose, but then I was surrounded by a soft feeling.

「You are....everything to me. I love you from the bottom of my heart from now... to forever and forever on, Mariabell」

I am hugged.

As soon as I noticed something in me came overflowing.

It is me and at the same time not me.

Perhaps something very important for “Mariabell”?

Neither my father nor the nōmen maid could provide.

I was able to obtain what I was always missing, what I was always craving, in the warmth of my mother.

I think “happiness” is the correct word for this moment.

「O, kā.....-sama, o kā,-sama」

「I am sorry for making you feel so lonely. As Mariabell says, it was mother’s fault」

「U , ~a..... u ā ā a..... ~tsu」

A gentle hand stroking her hair, a soft smile, a loving voice to spoil her, was something Mariabell had for the first time.

I know. I remembered the perfect life and conditions given to me ever since I was a baby, having received ever thing I had ever wanted.

But for Mariabell.

I do not know how Mariebell grew and lived her life up till now.

But I couldn’t help but have expectations for the gentle smile and sweet voice calling my name.

Mariabell now knew all of that for the first time.

In that case....can’t help it then.

I will let you fully feel the love and warmth of a mother and the affection that wipes away all of our unease and anxiety.

Even if later I am hit by the shame and embarrassment of having cried like a little child and want to hide away in a hole.

¹ *It seems she starts referring to herself in third person a little starting here.*

Chapter 5: Between forward and backward

「~Tsu....., zu~tsu」

「Are you alright?」

「Yhes...」

No, it is not all right. I feel so embarrassed and ashamed that I want to be buried right now.

By the time I stopped crying it had already been about ten minutes, the cool mind that should have been synchronized with “Mariabell” was completely filled with shame.

..... What was that all about a while ago.

It is similar to auto mode, but at the same time completely different in a way.

Both the tears and the words that came out were beyond my control; it is certainly my.....Mariabell’s true intentions.

It was different than auto mode which does not allow me to move, and it was still part of my will.

But the tears, that is the behavior and thoughts of the “original Mariabell”.

I am myself, and at the same time not myself. It was a mysterious feeling, almost like myself and the original Mariabell are slowly completely becoming one.

It was a phenomenon that I never felt before, neither in auto mode nor in my current life for the past three years.

「—— chan ... Maria-chan, what’s wrong? Is it painful somewhere after all?」

「E... a~, no it’s all right」

I quickly shook my head to mother who had a panic expression on her face.

This won’t do, now I have no time to think about other things.

If you miss this window of opportunity, what little chance you might have had might forever be gone and you might never get another opportunity again. From there things will only get worse.

You have to pick the picking buds.

「I am sorry to have shown you such an unsightly appearance」

「NoI should be the one to apologize. I didn’t even notice my own daughter’s feelings」

Iya, ma~a....it may have been some of my mother’s responsibility in the past five rounds.

It was a period that would make any three-year old child feel lonely.

But this time it’s not ‘Mariabell’ but instead the older me. It’s not like I didn’t feel any loneliness, I was sad when I thought I might be hated, but I am an adult after all.

I was able to hide my inner feelings and laugh.

I cried a little while ago so I may not sound convincing, but I would like to point out that was beyond my control.

「…… Let's talk. From now on, there will be plenty of time」

「Ah-..Yes!」

The gently laughing mother is the same as the one I saw a few years ago.

I am now 3-years old. If it is as the original, two years from now those two will get divorced, I do not know if there is any cause or whether it will emerge from now, but it is a fact that I made a step forward.

I was able to finally step forward.

× × × ×

「Hmmm...」

Today I had a cup of tea in my mother's room, we talked until dinner time.....and when I noticed it was dark outside I returned to my own room but was worried about a new problem.

Waiting for us as we headed from mother's room to the dining hall was an deadpan father who could not express any feelings.

Anne was next to him, so he probably heard from her about how I had brashly charged into mother's room.

Father always doted on me, but I thought this time for sure I would be scolded for my actions..... or that is what I thought, but my father only said:

Because Beruderia is tired, do not push yourself too hard. ”

It was said with a bitter expression.

Depending on how you interpret it, it can sound like he does not want me to be involved with my mother.

In fact, judging from mother's face it seemed like she was on the verge of tears.

Even though dinner is suppose to be a time where family can gather together happily around delicious food, it can't just only be me who felt like we were at a funeral.

「Somehow... it is different from what I thought」

I opened my notebook and updated the data written in it.

Even though today's things are supposed to be surely moving forward I wonder why it does not come together nicely. Just like a certain feeling where something feels out of place.

It seems like I mistook something fundamental.....

「....First of all I have to ask my mother's story」

Yes, that is my primary goal.

After thinking it over and over that was the conclusion I came to. If it comes to nothing while I am at a loss, I may cry. I will definitely cry.

Will it be a walk in the ballpark or will it be like walking on a tightrope without a lifeline.....it all depends on me.

Some daredevil may choose the tightrope walking, but unfortunately, I am not reckless or a masochist.

I am an ordinary girl with a healthy sense of values. It is not a joke to go ahead through the steep way by oneself.

[Let's visit mother tomorrow]

After all it will not be possible for me to think alone.

"If you do not understand you should listen" It is useless as it is troublesome because it is a skill to obtain through interpersonal skills.

I put the notebook away in the depths of the drawer so it would not be seen, and I go to bed.

Chapter 6: Keito Eirisu

I succeeded in interacting with my mother and I am progressing smoothly.
..... is what I wish I could say.

My excitement from the feeling of progress is starting to wane. I wonder why I am worrying about that problem now? Today I have a more important event than that.

「Maria-chan, are you alright? There are a lot of people around so are you tired?」

「E... a~, no it's all right. Do not force yourself mother.」

Somebody praise me for worrying about my mother even though my own heart is pounding from fatigue and tension.

Facial muscles are complaining of pain. I believe this is a symptom called Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness.¹

Why do I have to endure such pain? Although I could avoid this by using the excuse that I am a child, this would neither be the appropriate time nor place to do so.

Because the main character today is me.

「Mariabell-sama, congratulations」

「Already four.....children grow up quite fast」

Today is the party celebrating the birth of the Tempest Duke's only daughter.....That is my "birthday party".

It is quite natural that the scale is not a cute thing like a regular "birthday party".

My parents, and a lot of non-relatives at my 4th birthday....wow, is everybody that free?

I am satisfied if I just get a birthday gift, but I can't open them till after the party.....I have not been here even an hour yet and I already want to return.

The delicious dishes and sweets are lined up in front of my eyes, but the dress is so tight I doubt whether anything would be able to reach my stomach.

The greetings that come in lieu are all really directed at my father, in reality father is the reason why nearly everyone is here.

But the thing that annoyed me the most was when a lady came over.

「Mariabell looks really like you Duke, I am looking forward to her growth in the future」

「Well, really though I wish the eye color would have been like mine too」

It is the "mother's eyes" the lady's eyes seems to say so.

Even fools would be able to tell the eyes are not friendly.

Even if I was a real four-year-old, I would have still been able to feel the unpleasant atmosphere.

Like my father's copy, I also look alike to my father.

My face will change as it grows, if memory serves then ten years later Mariabell will turn into a beautiful girl who inherited the cold beauty of her father.

The only place that is similar to mother is the color of the eyes – a pastel purple. It is hard to notice the eyes because of the similarity to father.

I wanted to resemble my mother.

Pastel colors seems unusual even in a fantasy world where a wide variety of colors are allowed.

It would have been the perfect thing to say to that sarcastic lady from a little while ago.

I myself like it because it matches the violet hair of my father. Though if you ask me there is no big difference between pastel colors, and other colors like blue and green.

[.....]

[... Mother, are you all right?]

[E-, I'm alright ... Maria-chan, are you not hungry? You have not eaten the cake yet?]

[Eh.....?]

[Mother is doing the greetings, so if there is anything you want to eat go ahead]

The usual gentle smile wavered, and there was an atmosphere where I could not say whether it was a bitter smile.

Maybe because I'm still a child, mother did not want to let me see the ugly side of adults. Otherwise there is no reason for that gentle mother to have such a forced expression.

[..... Yes. I will have some cake]

I am worried about leaving my mother, but I can not do anything even if I am there. No, rather, if I am there it will only harm her.

When I thought so, it made it harder to resist, I just could not leave the spot.

× × × ×

[.....Tired]

As my mother told me, I went around the party and ate cake or anything ... I was exhausted.

Like I believed, everyone's aim was my father, the atmosphere around him was awfully sweet.

My father, Duke Asta Kirua, head of the Tempest, just looking at that status only you can tell he is high ranking aristocrat, the Tempest family name is among the highest in the country it can even be said that it is only second to the royal family.

Of course it can change if you take into account various positions and circumstances. With my knowledge further explanation is impossible so I will give up. In other words, it is a very great house.

And I am the only girl in such a house, moreover, I am doted upon by my father very much, anyone under those circumstances would become very special.

No, it is very annoying.

Moreover, I am only a 4-year old brat. Regardless of the inside, it is essentially giving a child diamonds.

The father who is oblivious to this...is happily greeting guests. Those guests with their impure motives, children with parents like those are likely to grow up to be like their parents, and their children like them and so on and so forth.

Human insincerity is unbelievable.

The ulterior motives that they hide scare me.

I was relieved when I came to the secluded backyard, here I could finally relax.

「I'm so full and my feet hurt.....」

This is just once a year I want you to forgive me. Do diplomacy in another place.

「I wonder if it will finish soon ...」

「What will? 」

「What ...!??」

It's deja vu.

No, it isn't deja vu, is it deja vu? I do not care any more.

In other words, it is familiar. Why do I feel like I saw you before.

Ah but surely when you say deja vu it's supposed to be something like "You never experienced it, but you feel like you have experienced it", correct? Then this is not deja vu.

I had let my guard down because I thought there was no one around.... this was something I had experienced before.

Let 's make my motto "Hunter and hunted" tomorrow from now.²

「Can you hear me?」

「I do not want to hear it, but I can hear it」

While looking at the source of the voice while holding my head, the person who this voice belongs to is as expected.

「You again.....」

The boy from before was standing right there. What is this encounter rate? Are mob character appearance rates that high? This is the most disgusting pattern to meet when you do not want to meet.

「I was here first」

「Is that so...」

Once again? Am I not looking around enough? No this boy is just too shadowy. I do not know whether I am just making up excuses.

「So, why are you so tired today, isn't today your birthday, isn't it?」

「Ewhy do you know」

「“Today is Mariabell-sama's birthday” that is what my father said」

「father?」

An unpleasant sweat flows down my back.

From the tone I had thought he was a commoner, even if he was a nobleman, I thought that it was a lower rank.....what if he is actually a very important child. If you were invited to my birthday party, there is no way you would be a commoner.

If so, this is very bad. Because I am a ojōsama.

「The flowers at the arch in front of the the entrance, and around the manor. My father raised them」

「」

Hmm? Arch? Flower?

「Keito Eirisu, my father is doing his best taking care of the garden」

「Wait a minute.....」

Garden, guarding...guard?³

No, no, it is completely different. It is alright, calm down.

「Garden.....your father does garden care?」

「Isn't it easy to tell?」

Is that so...

But I do not want you to look at me as if asking “What are you talking about”. It is painful for children to be stupid.

「Ah ... so that is why you were in that rose garden that day」

「I was bored until my father's work was over」

I see. And I am relieved.

This time and even last time, I have revealed my true nature to this boy. You might think it's not a big deal, but it is a suicidal act to do in the upper class ... it is plain foolish.

Otherwise the meaning of receiving a gifted education from a young age as a child of nobility disappears.

Me? I use the past five rounds (Mariabell's) experience and the degree of manners I need for a 4 year old child is perfect.

Although my time as a child will come to an end, but ... I think the foundation is at least complete.

Positive thinking.

「So... Eh, boy」

「Keito」

Hmm? What was that?²

「Keito Eirisu, I am five years old so I am older than you」

「E-...is that so」

To be frank, even if he is five I do not consider him older than me. In fact. Please consider my mental age.

No, even so, this is reality now isn't it? Keito is definitely older than me since I am four years old today. He is five so he would be older.

「Keito-kun, what are」

「Keito is fine Suddenly calling me with -kun feels weird.」

「...Keito, what are you doing here, are you not going to join the party?」

「Because a gardener's son attending the party would be troublesome in many ways, I heard that the head did not mind, but the eyes around me were..」

The child was a little direct...but I agree.

「You are today's spotlight, what are you doing in such a place」

「.....I appreciate that everyone went out of their way to attend my party tonight and are having so much fun, regardless of any ulterior motives, but it can be a little tiring not to be able to say what is on your mind, whether you are frustrated or tired, so in other words」

「It was annoying and I ran away」

Even if people were going around conducting underhanded business, you can not say it easily. In fact, I say it is better to "turn a blind eye"....is that how you use it?

「Everyone is overreacting just because I am four years old. There are more important things to me ...」

「Is it what you said that time?」

「.. Yes, thanks to Keito, I am on good terms with my mother, so thank you.」

「Oh, did I do something?」

「.... I am thankful, so that's fine」

If anything.....this child moves at his own pace. I say that the pace is a bit perturbing.

Are all five year old children like this? I wonder if I can interact with

「But, I am suffering from a new problem again...」

「Your mother? 」

「No, my father」

1. *Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS), also called muscle fever, is the pain and stiffness felt in muscles several hours to days after unaccustomed or strenuous exercise. So in her case I suppose smiling too much?*
2. *Original line was 油断大敵 essentially meaning “The most frightening opponent is to relax yourself and carelessly”*
3. *Original line was にわし、二鷺、鰯……? (Ni washi, ni washi, iwashi……?) Japanese wordplay so I changed it since it wouldn’t make sense in English.*

Chapter 7: A stone bridge that cannot be broken¹

Yes, my father is preventing me from making progress.

I had initially thought that mother could manage to do something for me.

I was naive.... I thought for a moment that it would be an easy victory.

「Your father...is the head」

「That's right」

My father, Asta Kirua · Tempest.

It seems that he was the only son of the Tempest family and succeeded after the predecessor, my grandfather, retired.

He was the only son and originally had excellent taste, so he did not have any objections from his relatives.

Perfect family social standing. Lucid mind.

These are two elements that make him a prime target for those woman whose aim is to marry into a wealthy family. But aside from that there is another factor.

To put it bluntly, it is his appearance.

Well, he is the father of an otome game's beautiful villainess after all.

But my father seems to be very cool even from a daughter's perspective.

Dark deep blue eyes and violet hair. It is so beautiful that it's actually quite blinding, but the eyes are cold like Mariabell. As expected of a parent and child. They are definitely alike.

With those three combinations it's no wonder father is so popular.

Even then women would compete against each other and would target him like a capture target and try to become his wife and have his children, I wonder if actual victory exists in a harem.

However, even with those array of powerful weapons at his disposal, my father did not play around and fall in love and chose to live a serious school life, he married early at the young age of 23 and worked as a former secretary.

By the way, in the same year, he also later on become the head of the Tempest family at the age of twenty-three.

What to say those are some scary specs. But I knew.

This will be Mariabell too.

Although because her father is better than most men and because he dotes on her it cause Mariabell's ego to become higher than Mt. Everest.

But if that ego is eliminated then it will not become involved in any love affairs.

「What, are you hated by the head this time?」

「No you are wrong」

Please do not damage my heart and spirit so lightly. If you were really worry about it, it was a fatal moral injury.

「My father loves and dotes on me very much, he is my kind and respected father」

「Respected.....?」

「Father is a great person after all」

It is not strictly different, but if you explain it properly it will be unnecessary to know.

「Hmmm.....then, what were you thinking about now?」

「It's not really a big deal」

Why is this child so interested in me.

No, if you see someone troubled in front of your eyes, you would be worried. It is common among girls, is not it? Although it would appear something is wrong but when you ask “What’s wrong” the response back is “It is nothing” even though it is obvious that something happened.

I dislike it, but ... if I do not answer here it will be the same thing.

In the end guess I will talk about it.

「Not me, but my mother. Somehow they do not seem to be getting along well」

Both my father and mother are very kind and gentle to me.

I think that it is a good parent-child relationship, such as reading my picture book by my father, eating a snack with my mother, talking with my father, taking a nap with my mother. They both care for me very much and I also love my parents.

But that is about parentage relationship, not marital relationship.

The relationship between a married couple I think that it is honesty dangerous.

My mother is no problem.

It would seem that my latest dark history that made me hide in my room worked and everything that happened before seemed like a lie. It also became a good laugh, now I am the idol of the mansion that is liked by all the servants. My mother is too cute.

The problem is my father.

It would seem that as mother’s mood rises father’s mood seems to drop proportionately to the amount mother’s mood rises.

I am anxious about a wrinkle appearing on the middle of my forehead soon.

Lover’s ruin.

Originally father is not an amiable person. In actuality he is rather bad.

Just that beautiful look will do wonderful work without a smile. There seems to be no doubt that he can call it a talent and that his personality has never become a hindrance in terms of his work.

However, that is only a matter of work.

The husband-wife relationship does not go smoothly like his work.

「Father seems cold towards mother somehow」

「The head....?」

「E ~e, I feel like my father is being avoided by the servants...」

Or at least that is what the general atmosphere feels like.

I am hesitated to declare it in front of a 5-year old child, even though I am only 4-years old myself. Considering what I am saying it it would be bad if in any case it was leaked to someone

「The head is kind to me though」

「He is also very kind to me」

「I know right?」

「But he is cold towards my mother for some reason」

When my mother left the room, that was not the case. Rather than that, the couple's conversation itself was zero.

If anything.....any hope I had was shattered at dinner on the day I first got angry and talked with my mother.

And the severe attitude towards mother seemed to cause distrust with the servants as well, and father gradually lost interaction with with many of the servants.

In other words, being avoided.

Now the there are only a limited number of people that talk to my father, perhaps the number of people can be counted with one hand. Of course, including me.

My father is alone like Mariabell, the similarity between the two is downright uncanny. I don't like it.

「They do not interact with each other, the two are essentially never together....as a matter of fact I have never seen them going out together」

「Bad relationship? 」

「.....」

That is what it seems like right.

Anyone who would hear about their relationship would probably think that. I am not pleased at all. It seems that I was not wrong in my review.

「 Yeah ... I think so too 」

「 I think that if their own child thinks that too then isn't it plainly obvious? 」

If this was a manga there would be many arrows stuck in my body.

In a sense this child is great. You are only 5-years old and you already know how to attack the vital spots of a person, it makes me anxious about your future.

「 So, what shall I do? 」

「 No, I know the rules for this time 」

「? 」

「 Just go for it, if it fails ... 」

In that case there is no choice but to proceed fully forward.

One year after five years old they will divorce. I do not know the exact date but it should have been around when Mariabell was 5-years old. I wonder if I can cheat and deceive until then.

Baby? Chicken? Call me anything.

Because I was in Maria Bell, I did not think anything about bullying, originally I am a person who “hits and strikes a stone bridge and finally finds other roads”.¹

If possible, I want to avoid dangers and annoyances in my life.

「 If I fail it might become a bigger problem than before 」

「right 」

Yes, that is a problem.

What to do if I don't make it in a year....what is more, there is no guarantee that the two people will not divorce after all beyond five years. Even if my recollections are correct, and things go according to the game I cannot affirm things will go accordingly since my auto mode was turned off.

Also, it is not surprising that my mother dislikes father as it is now....father will not lack a candidate successor even if they divorce. In the game, it was a father-in-law family, and maybe there is no problem to remarry even if there are children.

「 .. what shall I do, it is only me who will be troubled 」

The prevention of divorce between these two people is essential insurance for me to live.

I feel uneasy when auto mode is turned off again but when I return to auto mode I absolutely dislike it. In such a stress-filled life, I think that it is more healthier to just hide indoors so that I do not even meet the heroine and the capture target.

So it doesn't resort to that, I would like those two to be in good relations.

「……Nothing but to do it」

「Do what?」

「Now that it is decided, I must prepare If I ask Anne..... 」

「So, what are you—」

「Keito」

I block out Keito's voice of suspicion, and laughed.

Although I think even of myself of someone who is able to adapt quickly to changing situations, but still when I think about what I've decided, I again feel troubled and anxious.

I'm a baby and chicken, and I still think I should just avoid danger and trouble. I am a human being who strikes the stone bridge and finally searches for other roads.¹

「You will also be cooperating」

If there are no other paths, then you just have to find the courage to cross right through the middle of the stone bridge.

1. *Title drop and essentially means giving up or trying alternatives if the going gets rough or the issue becomes too complicated.*

Chapter 8: Sink or swim

Do not rush when in a hurry. When you are trying to do things in a hurry take a safe and secure detour rather than a short cut containing danger.

Our ancestors often said. I feel like I thought something like this before, but now is not the time to look back on the past. I cannot turn back now. Strike while the iron is hot.

「Mother, father」

「Maria-chan, where have you been?」

By the time I finished discussing the plan with Keito, the party was already over, and only my parents who were waiting for me and the servants who were cleaning up were left.

Originally I suppose it should have been the leading role of today to dissolve the party, but it is only a birthday party of a 4 year old child after all. There will not be people waiting for the child who went out to play.

Besides, it is more convenient this way.

「Did you eat some of the dishes and cake? You suddenly disappeared midway through the party...」

「E ~e, I was resting outside because I was so full from all the food」

「Is that so, then that's fine」

Mother who was looking tense let out a sigh of relieve after hearing my words.

Apparently it seems that she was worried when she could not find me at the table where all the dishes were lined up.

She sure is a worrywart, I thought for a moment. You would feel uneasy if your daughter who just reached 4 years old today suddenly disappears from your view.

Even if the child is not a daughter, having a little child wandering outside alone is dangerous. Even if it is within the premises, the inside of the premises of such a large mansion is practically the same as the outside. Of course security is perfect, but that is not the problem.

「Today must be tiring, the bath is ready, so you should rest early tonight」

「Thank you mother」

A little bit behind mother, father is talking to the secretary Orsseine-san.

Un, I did not see anything.....

While carefully checking the distance of father, I cup my hands over my mouth. Understanding from my motion that it was a secret, mother brought her ear to my mouth.

「Ano ne, Maria, I have a request to ask of mother」

「Request?」

Being as childish as possible, as cute and young at the heart. This is an innocent wish of a child, I do not have any other will.

Is it really a good idea to use this plan, essentially this plan is just capitalizing on the fact that I am a four year old child.

I will forsake logic and reason and hope this time luck is on my side.

「Ano ne, tomorrow —」

So that no one.....especially my father could not hear, I whisper my request in a voice so quiet that only my mother could hear, and my mother nodded with a gentle smile as usual.

At the noon of the next day, I carried a big bag on my back and led mother by the hand.

「Maria-chan, there is no need to panic so much」

「Though I am not upset, I must hurry」

「.....? 」

My mother tilted her head puzzled but did not say anything, and I continued leading her down the corridor.

What children are capable of doing, is something adults should not take lightly. It is wonderful because any unforeseen circumstances can be explained with “Because it is a child.”

For me now my greatest advantage is being a 4 year old child.

「Over here, mother」

「Did you want to come to the courtyard?」

The destination is a courtyard surrounded by four sides. There are a lot of large and wide courtyards at our house, but this time I selected the smallest place in the center of the house among them.

The reason? Because it is easy to escape? It is disadvantageous if it is wide and there are no obstacles.

I strongly pulled my mother’s hand to the person who is sitting on a bench in the courtyard.

「Sorry to keep you waiting, father」

「Maria ... you」

「Kirua-sama.....?」

My parents stared at each other unable to hide their surprise.

They seem to be surprised so much just to have met each other even though they live in the same mansion Are you two really couples? Well I was born, no really.

「Maria-chan, this is ...」

「Father, mother」

While my mother was surprised, I let go of her hand and withdrew behind step by step. Once I withdrew to the entrance way I said clearly to the two people watching there.

「Maria will be running away from home」

× × × ×

Yesterday, in the bath which is too big I was not able to relax as usual. But because of nōmen maid's assistance, it is extra large.

Children's hands are small, I hate it. It is better if I compare it with the sense of shame from when I was a baby.

A small head suitable for a small hand is washed, in addition the body was washed, after being wrapped in a fluffy towel, I was wearing silk pajamas that were unfit for a 4 year old child ... and now.

I am not at my own room but at my father's secretary's room.

A voice replying "Yes?" was returned after several knocks, and the owner of the voice who opened the door looked around several times before glancing down.

Sorry for being small.

「.....Maria ojōsama?」

「Sorry for intruding so late, Orsseine-san」

Father's secretary, Orsseine · Eric.

A slim figure and orange hair, with bright eyes the same color as the hair, and a black eye patch over one eye emphasizes a mysterious youthful appearance.

Apparently also a childhood friend of my father.

To be truthful I do not need to address him with any honorifics.... but I cannot bring myself to do so after all he is my father's friend and classmate.

I guess it would be possible to brush it off as the innocence of a four year old child, but I cannot adapt to that. I'm sorry.

「.....For now please come inside. You must not catch a cold after taking a bath. 」

「Yes」

Good, I was not turned away.

I was a bit worried because I was a ojōsama and the other a servant, but if I think about it carefully isn't it even worse for the other party.....?

A rumor like inviting a four year old girl into their room could spread.

If a rumor spreads that Orsseine-san is a lolicon that would be bad.....actually the appearance of Orsseine-san is rather childlike or youthful so it should not be a problem.

A women's ikemen filter is amazing.

「Because I only have coffee, would you like to get something else to drink」

「It's fine ... because I only came to talk」

「.....understood」

He leads me to the sofa and stoops down so that his eyeline matches mine. He is skilled with the handling of women.

His soft and thin orange eyes are kind and gentle.....for ordinary four-year-old girls he would be like a prince that would make their heart throb.

I am an adult just mimicking a 4 year old child, so I don't feel any of that excitement.

「I came to make a request to Orsseine-san」

「Yes」

「Please make father take a day off tomorrow」

「..... Yes? 」

A request from me, that is to make my father's schedule empty tomorrow.

Actually I did not want to limit it to just tomorrow, but.....my father is the head of our house and he is a great person. I cannot wait for my father's holiday because I do not know what time it will be.

It would be fine if the situation does not move while waiting, but the possibility of the situation worsening persists. My heart is not durable so far.

「...I'm sorry if I was letting you feel lonely Maria ojōsama. I will coordinate with Kirua and adjust the schedule so until then — — 」

「I will run away from home tomorrow」

「Eh.....? 」

「Father and mother should talk. The two of them will not talk without me, but they will still not let out their feelings even if I am there」

The two people talk through me, but because it is through me they will not talk heart to heart. Of course you would not be able to tell your 4-year-old daughter the conversation between a couple.

Then, it is best for me to leave home.

「I asked by my friend. Do my parents not get along with each other?」

I felt like saying I was asked rather than I was told.

「I also thought so」

They do not talk, do not go out, their eyes do not even meet.

Couples are suppose to be close, and their exchanges is even lower than that of acquaintances let alone a couple.

“My father and mother are close”. Is not something I, let alone a real four-year old child can even say. At this point I would say it is a good time to escape from reality.

「I would like the two people to talk by themselves, so I will only tell Orsseine-san that I am running away, so would you please help me?」

Please assist me.

With that in mind, I lowered my head. Because Orsseine-san was below me It may have looked like drooping though.

How long has it been? Because I was awfully tense it seemed to me like a long time had passed, even though it was actually a few seconds.

「……I understand」

The voice was gentle and my eyes meet the orange eyes.

「I will work hard to make up for Kirua-sama’s share from the day after tomorrow. I was also concerned about those two…… to make Mary ojōsama worry like that as parents is definitely a problem now isn’t it?」

「T...thank you very much!!」

「Not at all」

I feel a gentle sensation on the back of my head as my hair is stroked and when I slowly raised my head.

My head is patted.

If I was a high school girl, it would be -kyun point, but now it is not so much.

「Well....could you tell me what strategy Maria ojōsama has in mind?」

「Yes! 」

Anyways, I was able to get a reliable ally. Based on my plan, Orsseine-san will prevent the escape of father and mother, covering all the information of father I did not know.....it is safe to say that the strategy including information is perfect.

If this fails, there is no choice but to give up.

Chapter 9: Safe Haven

In this way, the “Battle between parents and parents ~ and daughter running away from home” was decided.

While my parents were surprised and unable to react to my sudden declaration, I quickly turn around and run.

After my declaration, I would run to the safe haven, that was my role.

Although I was the planner I had fewer jobs.....if I interfere too much it will be the same as before. They may hide their true feelings as they are in front of their child.

I endured my desire to look back and sped up.

× × × ×

Although I call it a runaway, my destination is within the premises.

The place is a building where the servants live, the appearance is a fashionable apartment, with one room in it.

Reaching for the doorbell, “kankararān”, the bell sounded. I am glad that it was light outside now.....if I heard this sound at midnight it would probably mean that one of my neighbor’s house was on fire.

「Y — es.....?」

「It’s Mariabell」

The response was a child’s voice, it was as expected Keito when the door opened.

「You’re early」

「Thank you for your help」

My safe haven is Keito’s house. Of course, I got approval from Keito’s father with some help from Orsseine-san.

I have reported execution and whereabouts, I am a very reasonable runaway.

「My father is still at work, so feel free to relax」

「Pardon my intrusion」

I take off my shoes properly at the entrance, though there are no slippers.

The room is white with a country-style interior decoration, and it is more modest compared to my lavishly decorated house. However, this is what I was looking for. It is quieter and is all right ideally.

Simple is best, nicely said.

Since I started in my room the interior decoration was not familiar to the eyes, I thought whether it is the standard decoration of this world, but it is different.

What a relief, let’s have a make-over if the couple makes up.

「Is that all your luggage?」

「E ~e, it's only for a day so I do not need to bring much」

I said that to the Keito who was surprised that all I had was the bag I was carrying on my back.

He seemed to think that I would have brought more baggage because of my position as an ojosama.

Well if I were an adult.....there may have been more luggage the size of around a carry case, but I am a 4-year old child, neither cosmetics nor hair straighteners are necessary.

No, as a person suffering from a natural perm, a hair iron is essential ... but I would not be able to use it no matter how hard I try since I am only four.

「I thought that someone will help you bring it, stuff such as dresses」

「Because I am running away from home for the time being, the only person who knows I am here is Orsseine-san」

「Running away?」

「Because my parents does not know that I am here」

A mug appeared on the table while I was setting down my bag, were you preparing that?

It is unexpectedly nice. Until now you have been pretty rude, so I will reevaluate you.

「Thank you」

「There is only tea though」

「I love tea」

After telling me that, the taste of tea which I drank was a taste I liked after all.

In this world, the mainstream of noble drinks is black tea. Therefore my search for various kinds and brands does not stop. I always drink milk tea before going to bed, and apparently various brands are used. But I never knew the difference.

On the contrary, tea is also popular among commoners. But the types and brands for them are limited and the taste is also average, as it is mass-produced goods. Normally this taste would not suit the luxurious tongue of an ojosama.

But I like this cheesy taste.

「This calms me down. Good things are delicious, but I am sick of it」

「You are an ojosama, aren't you?」

「It's because I am an ojosama」

You must care about manners and must take in differences in taste delicately, you cannot help but feel it is troublesome. Especially in regards to taste I am quite particular.

There are some things that even if they are high-class foods I still think they taste bad, and things like even though it is junk food I still think it tastes good. It is due to easy-to-understand seasoning, while delicate high-class dishes are honestly difficult to understand.

There would not be such a problem if it was Mariabell.....but it is not something that I can handle.

「It must be hard to be an ojosama」

「I cannot complain because I have it easy」

I will have no trouble with money, I will spare no investment for my future.

The background that can become a pressure if it is an adult is the strongest support for a child.

In order to do what is necessary to break the death flag, to build an insurance against the capture target, and to study to gain the knowledge that is necessary to profit afterwards, the current situation is serious but by no means is there dissatisfaction.

「..... Afterwards it's hard to say whether father and mother will make up」

「It would be nice if they could solve everything by today」

「They will! Definitely!」

I will be troubled if you say that!! Because I could only clear my father's schedule for today.

Orsseine-san, thank you very much for your efforts.

The next day the anxiety in my heart was settled.

I was greeted by two people lined up with a smile and I was convinced of my success when Orsseine-san who stood behind them nodded.

Chapter 10: The moon you see is always beautiful

「If you want Maria ojōsama to return please talk properly. It is alright, I am keeping track of Kiruasama's schedule and I am also keeping track of where ojōsama is located. Do not worry about your four-year old daughter」

While suffering from Maria's runaway declaration, Orseine threw only what he wanted to say and went away. It is not my imagination that the last words were said in a much lower voice than the others.

Both of us could not leave and we sat down on the bench just before we were told to talk. Although they are next to each other, Bēruderia is close to the edge and there is no word exchange.

Complete silence.

If we interpret the words Orseine just said, Maria is worried about us and said that she would run away after that.....

In my heart, there are countless possibilities.

Between myself and Bēruderia there is a high rock wall. Of course Bēruderia does not feel that way. Even if I do not correct the original, I am the one who is at fault, and it is no exaggeration to say that Bēruderia is a victim.

She became my wife because I chose so.

That day, I found her.

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When I was just 23-years old there was a party held for my father the previous Tempest head. I forgot what the party was about, though I guess it probably was not a very important one if I don't remember.

Though at the time I was not yet the present head of the household, it was certain that I would become the next head. Therefore not only those for business purposes but also those for marriage purposes gather around me. Such party venue was honestly tedious and cramped, but I could not always feel depressed.

That's why I remember it vividly.

A gaze that does not change. A conversation that does not change. What surrounds me does not change as usual.

Except for one person.

Only Bēruderia was different from everything I knew.

Neither dress nor adornment, even makeup is not gaudy. The appearance like abandoning herself as inferior to other participants was overwhelmingly, it was far different from the image of "young lady" I knew.

— I thought it was beautiful.

I admired a person for the first time in my life.

I do not know why even if I am asked. I want to know.

Why was I so intensely attracted to her?

Why can I not keep my eyes off her?

Two days later, my childhood friend taught me the reason. With the same lightness as blowing air, rather, as to why I did not understand why.

The next day, I found out her name.

Bēruderia · Wimbuto, the eldest daughter of the Earl.

And then three days later I would meet her again.

× × × ×

How long did the silence last?

Her whole body is tense and it is easy to tell that she is nervous. I was the first to break the silence.

「Do you remember the day when we first met.....」

「O-...of course. At the marriage meeting——」

「Wrong」

「Eh.....? 」

「A week before」

After hearing my words Bēruderia seems to be flustered and her eyes wander around.

I guess it was just according to my memory. I am not wrong if going by my memory. But no matter how much I remember, there is no point. The correct answer for Bēruderia would be her previous statement.

Just for me. The correct answer for me.

「The party the week before, that was where.....I first met you」

「Party...」

「A~a That's why I wanted to talk with you」

「..... Eh? 」

「I wanted to marry you, so I nominated you」

Even though I was twenty-three years old, I had neither a lover nor a fiancée. The Tempest house never objected to the marriage I had hoped for, and there was no reason why the Countess of Wimbuto would refuse or could decline a marriage proposal from the duke's family, so our marriage got together.

Just one person whose feelings were left out, Bēruderia.

「.....I am sorry」

Standing up, I lowered my head in front of her.

An atmosphere that Bēruderia was puzzled surfaces.

「Kirua-sama.....」

「Although it was what I wanted, and I was given the highest priority, but I.....I did not think about your feelings」

Ignoring everything that should be avoided, I just prioritized my feelings and covered the things to see.

Taking care of any issues, pursue it with power, push the marriage that should have been mutual love one-sidedly.

「I think that it can not be helped if I apologize now. What I did was....out of line」

With a marriage forcibly pushed, I pushed hard without thinking about her feelings. It is a despicable action.

I cannot be liked. There is no help for it even if I am avoided.

I know. I understand it properly.

「But even so, I still like you」

× × × ×

「.....」

I am shocked, did I hear correctly?

Kirua-sama's words are spinning through my head with such force leaving me in complete shock.

I like you...he said he likes me.

It is neither a delusion nor a hallucination, it is certain he likes me.

「...r-really?」

My voice trembles. Not only my voice but also my fingers which are cold and lost color and temperature. I grasped both trembling hands together, I realized how much I was upset.

It's not a lie? It's not a dream?

As I was thinking that Kirua-sama is staring straight at me.

Beautiful blue eyes.

Some people are scared of those eyes, but I was anxious to see his eyes.

It's not a dream.

It's not a lie.

It is not a delusion.

It's no illusion.

This is reality.

「... I thought that I was hated」

Married at the age of 19, became a couple, Maria was born. It may look good on the surface, but the reality does not proceed so beautifully.

Though I knew the figure and name, we never really talked, that was the relationship between the 19 year old me and Kirua-sama. A marriage proposal came and could not be avoided, I got married, but a question that I could not ask anyone was circulating around my heart.

Why choose me?

I am plain and not special. I have eyes of a peculiar color, but I was despised because of it. I can never become the princess whom a prince would fall in love with at first sight.

So, I thought. It is a political marriage.

Surely Kirua-sama did not want to marry me. In fact, it is decided that women who are more beautiful and intelligent are better. Like the beautiful daughters of other nobles that surround him endlessly before and after marriage.

Once that thought took hold of me, I could not speak well with Kirua-sama.....even though I was afraid of him, he was kind to me.

Before I noticed it, I had lost most of my relationship as a couple.

「I was lost and hesitant, I could not accept you who tried to conform well ...I wondered if you regret getting married」

Even though you were gentle, even though you took good care of me, I turned all of it down. I told you that I wasn't ready, but it is painful if I think of what you lost there.

The number of times to talk decreased, the number of meetings decreased....before I noticed it came to a point where I could not turn back.

「Over and over again, I thought I had to talk. But every time I did not know how to proceed so I stopped....this was the feeling I had.

It was always Kirua-sama who tried to compromise. It was arrogant to assume he would continue when I kept turning him down.

I just stood there and did not act. My over-optimism for myself made Maria uneasy.

My beloved 4-year-old daughter.

I was spoiled by both my father and my mother and allowed her to worry, a child's only job should be to smile while growing up.

And this is the last chance Maria gave me.

If I do not take it, I am not qualified to call myself Maria's mother.

「It is true...at the time of the marriage meeting, I thought it was only with political thinking, a marriage with only doubts, and no romance anywhere」

「.....」

To my words, Kirua-sama's expression does not change. Of course, that is natural. Only the eyes narrowed sadly a little.

Words that hurt him like a blade. A certain fact that must be said. My honest feeling at that time.

A person who stands above others, whose appearance and family's social standing are superior. A person who receives love and envy from a lot of people. He is not good with love. But that's why others love him so quickly.

I certainly did not love him at the age of nineteen.

「But those are the feelings of me when I was nineteen」

From that day, the moon has flowed.

My 19 year old self has disappeared with the past.

「Right now, I do not regret marrying Kirua-sama」

At the age of 19 years old, it would be a lie to say I did yearn for you.

Today, at this moment, at this time, I do not regret anything.

「I.....I also like Kirua-sama」

I am sorry to believe that I was hurt without noticing that you were also hurt. For meeting, thinking and yearning for me, thank you.

Everything and everything, I wished I had told you sooner, I cannot help saying.

On that day, we knew what each other was thinking for the first time in our six year marriage.

Chapter 11: One misfortune went away, and ten more came up

Our parent / child relationship changed dramatically after returning from the runaway that ended on schedule as planned.

Of course, in a good direction.

「Kirua-sama, isn't it about time to go to work soon?」

「Orsseine-san, I will be ready soon」

「Take a rest today——」

「Hurry up and go foolish head」

The most strange one was father.

Before there was always a cold atmosphere around him, now there is nothing but a sweet look. For me he does not seem too different, but for mother the difference is like heaven and earth.

He changed too much...there are rumors flowing around like “Kirua-sama is broken” among the servants who thought that Father was cold-hearted. Orsseine-san was amazed from the bottom of his heart.

I had Orsseine-san tell me what happened after I ran away from home later.

It seems...the cause was a misunderstanding in thought. Although they were in love with each other, they seemed to have misunderstood that they were hated by the other.

Father who regretted having married without thinking about mother's feelings.

Mother who had convinced herself that it was a politician marriage.

Father had cut off mother because he thought she hated him, and mother misunderstood that she was disliked because of father's attitude.

I was avoided by mother because I looked like father and reminded her of him.

A splendid mistake.

This content is fitting for a shojo manga, but this isn't a shojo manga it's an otome game.

Two people went through a vicious cycle that would always end in divorce up to the fifth round.

But I do not need to worry about anything this time. I stopped the vicious cycle and the family and couple relationship were also good.

The servants who were watching father and mother who were acting “deredere” in front of me seemed to have changed their opinion of him, it seems the gap in his marriage and between him and the servants have disappeared after taking my advice.

I played with my mother, was watched by the servants, spoiled by my father, scolded by both my mother and father In such days, before I noticed, I had reached my sixth birthday.

The past of “Villainess Mariabell” where her parents divorced when she was at the age of five has changed. And I was able to break through the first barrier which was the most important to me.

To this fact, I was delighted heartily.

With this, the distance between the game and the character can be taken as far as possible, even if I cannot become completely irrelevant to the matter, I should be able to build a social relationship that seems to be gentle on the surface.

If I am not there, there will be no one that can act as the beautiful rival.

I will not stand out or interfere, and will just watch their love unfold from behind. At an ideal distance to listen to rumors again.

Simple.....I once thought. Yes, it is past tense.

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The educational background of this world is a little strange. it is not unusual for nobles and commoners to have a difference in academic background due to their difference in status and wealth.

In this world, nobles are unlikely to go to primary school. Every primary school age noble has a private tutor, and learns everything from studying to manners at “home”. And from junior high school students’ age they will go to Avuantoru Academy to learn magic.

On the contrary, the commoners and low aristocracy attend primary school, and in most cases it will be the final academic record.

And I will be six years old, and if I am a commoner, I am at the age of going to primary school. Children of nobility do not go to school, and it is said that one should “hire an exclusive tutor during the period from the age of six to seven,” so it is not strange that they may hire a family tutor soon.

I was preparing myself for this soon.

But, still, however! The person selected is...!?

「It is a pleasure to meet you for the first time, Maria ojōsama」

Platinum blonde hair and golden eyes. Still only someone in his early youth, nevertheless a beautiful boy is kneeling down in front of me.

「I am Greas · Fani · Sandoria」

I know.

One of my most recent memories, the person who broke Mariabell’s heart.

In other words, the capture target.

Why is this man here?

「From today I am supposed to serve as a tutor for Maria ojosama. It will be a pleasure to work with you」

「……Aa, yes」

I quickly shifted my expression and managed to smile, but my inner heart.

Someone please help me.

Or may I cry?

Chapter 12: I write as temple and read as shelter

Greas · Fani · Sandria.

The hidden character of 『LinaLia』 who is unlocked when you clear four capture targets. The Saint attribute magic teacher of the Avuantōru Academy. Loved by females, a marvelous genius magician even though he is from humble birth.

Refer to the characters page for commentary.

And was the person whom I did not want to engage with the most.

The hidden character “Greas” whose route is unlocked when you clear four other capture targets, is definitely suitable for a hidden character as the difficulty is quite high.

It will be easier to understand, if I explain that in his route if even one option is mistaken it will be guided to the bad end without question.

And I think that is enough to be able to understand what I want to say.

The possibility of bad end is also the possibility that my life will end as well.

If possible, I would like to eliminate all involvement, but there are a lot of activity scenes proportional to the degree of difficulty. His route is a mass production source of dark history and death flags, that will destroy you.

The only salvation is that Greas is a teacher in charge of Saint, and I am a student whose attribute is “darkness” a complete opposite.

If I am careful, there is no reason I will be involved with the other party.

The person I don't want to get involved with the most, should have no reason to be involved with me.

I thought so, I was at ease.....

「Maria-sama, were you able to do it?」

「Aa, yes.....」

In my room, I'm looking into my hands, I have to accept the reality which is “the person who I did not want to be involved with the most” is here.

By the way, Greas-sensei is a family tutor and it has been one month already.

The antique-like hard cover notes, which are not likely to be suitable for study, are lined up with the calculation formulas just taught. The newest letter is the problem the sensei issued which I solved already.

「Un, Yes, it's done. Maria-sama is quick to understand」

「You are good at teaching」

I smiled like a child, but it is natural that I understood.

The notes written in my notebook are “ $7 + 2 = 9$ ”, “ $9 - 4 = 5$ ”, “ $4 \times 3 = 12$ ”, “ $9 \div 3 = 3$ ”a calculation formula for adding and subtracting fills one page.

The subject is ‘math’. It is not “mathematics” nor “arithmetic”, but just simple math

It is certainly a suitable problem for 6-year-old me.

But my brain age is a high school X five times.

Although there is some stuff that I forget, “Math” is not one of them. I can do math in my head it’s an easy victory.

Maria-sama is good with Math.....language is also excellent, it’s better to raise the overall level.

「Ahaha.....I will leave it to you」

In the past month, I made a new discovery.

Greas....or Greas-sensei now, I would like to avoid being involved with him even now, but rather than that it is tiring to “learn” primary students coursework.

Tiring and painful.

But if I do not raise my level properly in order, I will surely start to digress, and one day my brain will not be at the level it’s suppose to be. Even so, if a six year old child begins doing high school level problems it may become a fuss.

“A child prodigy” then turns into “abnormality”.

「It seems that there is no problem even if I hand out other subjects in this case. Is there anything you would like to learn?」

「U~n.....」

Because I do not like studying itself so much, I do not want to answer honestly when asked what I want to learn, because I will answer “physical education”.

However, I cannot say that I do not want to study to the family tutor, or physical education either. If I order it, I might be able to play something like tag, but mother will surely scold me.

「You do not have to think about one right away. I will think about various things also myself」

「.....Yes, thank you very much」

The gentle smile by Greas-sensei is definitely suitable for a teacher. He also has an air around him that relieves people and is also good at handling children.

Surprisingly though it is rude to say, but my image of him is 24 years old. In my experiences, in ten years from now, this gentle oni-chan will grow up to become that sexual harassment teacher.

I think that in auto mode I was hurt to some extent when I was rejected by the teacher in front of me.

That much.....he is a good person, this person.

I decided to take as much distance as possible and it has already been a month. In the present situation he is a good person, a good oni-chan, that I cannot bear anything against him, and the call of Greas-sensei is completely fixed.

If he at least wasn't good at teaching, I could say that I wanted my father to change my teacher, but Greas-sensei is also very good at teaching. I guess I already knew that part though.

Really, what is the matter with me?

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「—— and that's the situation. What should I do」

「No, I do not know」

As a matter of fact, Keito broke off my words. From the time we cooperated with my parents' reconciliation, I had retained my relationship with him.

Keito feels that my acting like an ojasama is weird, and I am tired of acting like an ojasama. More than anything, there is no fear of nobles. Because Keito moves at his own pace, no matter what I say, there is no flattery and the likes. There are many rude remarks to that extent, but as for me I was more comfortable with that.

Keito, the commoner, attends primary school. It is our daily routine to wait in the rose garden and talk with each other until Keito's father comes to pick him up.

Most of the time it's me doing the talking though.

「Greas-sensei, right? We have talked, but I think he's a good person」

「I know. That's why I am troubled」

「Sorry, I do not understand your meaning at all. He is a good person and he is also good at teaching. What more can a tutor do?」

「……right」

As Keito says.

I do not want to become involved because I know the hypothetical future. But if I did not have to worry about the death flag, I would have been obediently gracious to Greas-sensei.

「Maria is thinking too much, even though you are stupid」

「I study though?」

「Un, that's why you are just stupid and not an idiot」

「Guu……」

As expected, though it is only because you witnessed my stupidity when I first met you. A choked-off voice appeared, but I cannot retort.

「I do not know what you are worrying about, but I think Maria is stupid, even if you try to think of something it is impossible because it is stupid. Because you are stupid」

「Do not keep saying stupid!」

He said it three times.

Even though I say important things only two times, he said it three times!

And to Keito do I really seem that stupid? I have too much memories to remember.

「It is useless even if you think about it, so try doing it as you think」

「……Un」

I think whether it is that easy to clean up the life and death concerns……Indeed I will be with both my father and mother, I thought about it and let's just attack it head on.

Regardless of whether it works on Greas-sensei……although I am suffering now from it, the actual damage comes out ten years later.

Also as a premise, the heroine does not always choose Greas-sensei. It will be the worst if she chose that, but there are four others, probability is one fifth.

…… Un, I feel like I managed to do something.

「Thank you, Keito. I will forgive you for calling me stupid」

「It's not necessary to forgive because I just said the truth」

「Well then, I will tell you a new subject this time, but what shall I do?」

「Listen to other people when they speak」

I know? Social skills are an important skill to have.

Especially for the villainess daughter of an Otome game.

Chapter 13: Just a small mistake

Three days after talking with Keito, I confronted Greas-sensei

Though I say that, it is not a big deal as we were only talking about newly taught subjects

「Magic, is that it?」

「Yes.....ano, is that a no?」

What I chose was “magic”.

Professional teaching will be taught by teachers who are in the higher level of Avuantōru Academy, while the secondary level you can also be taught by a private tutor Magic history, magic theory, magic usage, and magic tools.

Besides, Greas-sensei is going to graduate from Avuantoru Academy to become a teacher after this. I thought that there is magical knowledge to some extent even at the present age though.

「It's not a no ... but I am an amateur about magic. I do not have enough knowledge to teach Maria-sama」

「E.....」

I did not expect this. It is a lie.

I was doubtful of the Greas-sensei who had a bitterly sorrow smile that said “I’m sorry”, but I vaguely felt that it was not a lie.

「If I was an ordinary tutor, I could have taught you about magic, but....due to my past history, I am not in a position that I can teach it to Maria-sama who is a noble's daughter」

The real intention of those words lies in his past which becomes clear as you advance his route.

Greas the capture target is supposed to be a commoner in fact, he “Greas · Fani · Sandria” is a son of a former duke, so in other words a man of a former upper aristocracy.

And what that “past history” means, during a certain dukes time, the Tempest family and the Sandria family seemed to have a deep connection with that same duke, although there was no blood relationship. Details are not specified in the game, but Mariabell met with Greas because of that past history. Hostage of a political marriage.....bad personalities has no end. Something I am not fond of.

Un, I do not care about countdown memories for such a sad death.

What shall I do, magic. I thought that Greas-sensei would say okay, so I did not think of a second subject.

「Anyhow.....is there something else?」

「Let's get another tutor!」

「Eh.....? 」

I thought of thinking about other subjects though. Its not that I am not keen on magic, it's just I do not want to fall behind when I go to the academy.

「No, it is not necessary to get another tutor for a single subject」

「Instead of getting another one, I'm firing you and hiring a new one」

N? Why did I say that?

「I did not tell you but originally I was a noble, anyone can study....you can be taught even if it is not me. Maria-sama learns very quickly and I think that it would be better for you to find someone more capable instead of me」

「.....」

To be honest, that is something I do not desire.

Originally I thought about the relationship with Greas-sensei, and Keito had said that I should try to do anything.

None...though.

「... What will happen to Greas-sensei?」

「I.....cannot become a tutor for other nobles without any relations, so I will look for other jobs」

Because noble households usually hire tutors, the job is pretty high paying.

Besides that, Greas-sensei is not just a commoner but a former noble. How difficult is it for a former noble to find a job as a commoner I can understand having lived as a noble for the past five rounds

There are not many people who have a bad impression on the nobility, but for a “former noble” one has to wonder what cause them to fall.

Even though he is a talented person, if not for that reason he would not have so much trouble.

「..... Ano, Greas-sensei」

「Yes?」

「I would like Greas-sensei to tell me」

「... .. Maria-sama, let's take a break ——」

「No, I am serious」

No, I certainly bothered somewhat. But it is not a lie that I want Greas-sensei to tell me. It is my sincere real intention.

「Learning magic is a good thing, I just thought that I could prepare before going to middle school. If I want to study seriously in the future, I will ask another teacher. That's why ... do not tell me that you will quit」

「Maria-sama.....」

「.....Of course, if Greas-sensei wants to quit regardless of magic, I cannot stop it」

It is awkward to say that after telling me. Though it may be permitted even if I assume a defiant attitude because I am a “6 year old child”, but I could not mentally do so.

Faced down, I heard a voice filled with emotions while holding my hands.

It seemed joyful, but it was a little suppressed.

「……No」

Before raising my face to the voice, Greas-sensei took a knee and looked into my face.
I am wrapped by both hands while he was laughing.

「Thank you very much, Maria-sama. I am very honored that you feel that way」

「Then……!」

「I am sorry about magic though I do not want to quit, either」

「T-thank you!」

「It is my pleasure」

Greas-sensei who laughed and laughed, and I was caught, and at the end the two of us were both laughing.

The lesson of the day was “national language” as usual rather than a new subject. I hope the level has gone up a bit It was a very simple thing to me.

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At night, when I was alone, I took out the note from the drawer. It is an information note of the characters.

After meeting Greas-sensei, it also plays a role like a diary.

「I’m tired today……」

Of course I did not open the notebook to write such a thing.

The pen tip is writing different words from the voice.

『It is impossible not to be involved with Greas-sensei. You should toughen up』

This is extraordinary, but I cannot write anything else. If you make a choice that does not really matter, it is the other way around therefore in truth it is actually reversed.

When Greas-sensei told me he would quit, there was a possibility that if I let him I will not get involved. But I could not do that.

I know how hard it is for a former noble to find a job as a commoner, and I could not do that to him. Because he has absolutely no fault.

Learning magic and his job. It is obvious which to choose if you compare it. Even with the death flag you do not know if ten years later it will be the same.

Afterwards there is also a small possibility that if I make a friendly relationship now, I can reduce the flag a bit.

「It was exactly as Keito said ……」

In the end it seems acting while thinking is most suitable for me.

Keito’s prediction rate is amazing. He must be an Esper or something along those lines.

Chapter 14: Magic trick? No, it's magic

I opened up a few days after I decided my resolution.

Greas-sensei continues as my private tutor. It is natural because I said “Do not quit” and Greas-sensei agreed to it.

And one of the reasons is “magic”, but I got to learn it.

「Magic is divided into six attributes. Fire, water, earth, wind that is said to be four major attributes. Plus saint and darkness, six of them in total」

It is not Greas-sensei who is teaching in front of me now.

「There is a user of 『Reinforced magic』 specialized solely for reinforcement, but ... this is rare among the rare so I will skip the explanation」

And this place is not my usual room.

This is my place of relaxation, you guys know it as the “Rose Garden”.

On a round table made by mimicking plants, normally would be sweets and a vividly colored tea set. But now what is on the table is a study tool for two people.

Yes, for two people.

It is Orsseine-san who is teaching in front of me right now.

And now, taking classes with me ... Greas-sensei.

How did this happen? Of course it is not my fault, not to mention.

It seemed that Greas-sensei talked to father.

Greas-sensei who thought that I wanted to learn magic, crushed himself, talked with father as a result of adding to my resistance, Orsseine-san uses time between work ... to teach Greas-sensei and me magic.

I cannot keep up with this development that is too overnight.

First of all, why Greas-sensei is receiving classes next to me ... because my father was anxious about Greas-sensei's future work.

Qualifications and professional skills are important for finding employment! I want you to do in a place I do not know if possible!

「Do you have any questions so far?」

「No, I am.....」

「Me too. Orsseine-sama's explanations are very easy to understand」

「Fu fu, Thank you very much. So far we are only in the Intermediate section, so it's not a big deal」

It is said like it is nothing, but Orsseine-san's explanation is really easy to understand.

Father seems busy.....it is only the third lesson so far so if I do a bad job, father's workload will increase, Orsseine-san would be able to earn a lot even as a home tutor, if he were to ever quit as secretary.

Although Orsseine-san no longer working for our house, such a future is rejected because it would cause many issues.

「Let's end it here today, next time.....three days later, we will have lunch at the end」

「Yes, thank you very much」

「Thank you very much」

Today is about thirty minutes, the lesson is over.

Since it is a schedule assembled based on Orsseine-san's schedule, the time is different and the date is not fixed.

Anyhow I still have my own tutor, so my tutor is to have first priority.

To be honest, magic is more interestingrecently I finally started to do classes of the upper grade, but still “math” and “language” is unchanged.

On that point magic is knowledge that I did not know at all and I enjoyed it more than anything. It is very interesting to learn. For me, I want to get to the Intermediate section early, so much that magic was my favorite subject.

That's why I was looking forward to the next lesson.

I did not even notice that one leg was stuck between ignorance.

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What happened was about a couple of months since Orsseine-san started teaching us magic and about a year since Greas-sensei became my tutor.

「—— Today marks the end of learning the basics of magic of the intermediate section. Of course, in the intermediate section there is still the 『Reinforced Magic』 I did not dig into and instead we will learn more about each attribute in more detail」

「Yes, thank you very much」

「I really appreciate you taking a lot of time while you are busy」

To Greas-sensei who deeply lowers his head, I feel that my thankful words are extremely light. Orsseine-san also has a facial expression that I am not sure whether it is a smile or a bitter smile. But well, I do understand his feelings.

Unlike me who had the original right to learn, Greas-sensei was given the opportunity from my father. Neither my father nor I, and of course Orsseine-san think teaching Greas-sensei is “charity”, but...what he thinks is another thing.

Anyhow, It wasn't until today that I had Orsseine-san tell me.

「Anything beyond this point must be taught by someone with the resources and position to teach properly, not myself. Although it can be done to some extent if it is a practical skill ... 」

Everyone in this world has unattributed magical powers when they are born.

That magical power is polished at a Magic school and an attribute is determined. At Avantor Academy it will be divide into the Intermediate section and the Advance section, attributes are decided upon

entering the Advance section and then learning specialized magic.

In other words, we are in a state of “no attribute”.

A magical encloement instrument “Magic tool”, can be activated with no-attribute magical power.....we are “children”.

What I am trying to say is basically attributeless does not mean that it is dangerous just inexperienced.

If possible I would have like Orsseine-san teach me the overall experience of “magic”.....

Whether ending a magic study or hiring a new person, I do not think there is anyone more flexible than Orsseine-san.

Although it is too casual that I do not feel uncomfortable, originally it would have been impossible for Greas-sensei to be taking classes together here.

Unintentionally forgetting the place and being in a daze, Orsseine-san says 『Open!』 and hit my hands.

「Then for the end, let's try using magic once」

「..... Yes? 」

Ah, your “yes” just now was the not affirmative yes, but the “what did you say” yes.

Eh, did you say use magic? I did not understand your current statement.

「Of course, attribute magic is impossible and magic tools are still early for the two of you. But would you like to experience magic if you can use it safely?」

Safely? I completely missed out on the meaning.

「Since this was something that Kirua-sama and I used a long time ago, let's bring it out」

Apparently my question seems to have not been conveyed to Orsseine-san, but I called the nearest maid with a clap, and she whispered the meaning into my ear.

What I was concerned about was immediately resolved and the maid retreated instantly into the shadows. Do the maids of my house receive ninja training?

「This is a simulated wand. Here you go」

What was offered to us is a black rod.

Of course it is not just a rod, it gradually becomes thinner towards the end so it is understood which one is the end and which is the tip at a glance. A ball-like marble sticks to the point of the handle.

It seems that the model was not a fashion type thing but a mock wand. Misleading appearance.

「This is actually a simulated wand used in the intermediate section. The two of you can use it because limitation magic is placed on it, so it can be used safely even if an attribute is unstable」

「E-.....」

Although it is a missed reply, the inside is pretty excited.

Just being able to experience magic was bewildering enough.

「Well then, please be patient. Ah, you must not point it towards the mansion or a person」

Fireworks?

But as a beginner says if you do not do it will then you will really fail. Explanation is important.

「Arm straight out..... yes, please hold it tightly. When you wave it do not hesitate」

As I was told, I firmly clasp the wand in my hand.

It looks like a person drawing something. Or Homerun declaration.

「Well then, Greas-san. Please wave the wand from the top down」

「Ah, Yes.....」

Explanation became rough suddenly.

Greas-sensei also looked uneasy, but without swaying, he raised the wand, breathed deeply and then swung all the way down.

「.....!!?」

Before swinging completely down, just in the middle.

From the tip of the wand, light blew out.

For a moment I thought that it was seriously fireworks. A light trick using water, such a feeling.

There is no sound like fireworks, there is no smell, the place where the glowing light has fallen is not burnt. It became small before the surprised Greas-sensei pulled himself together and he was breathed deeply, at the end it was sucked into the tip of the wand and disappeared without a trace.

「.....」

「.....amazing」

Greas-sensei stood stunned and stopped moving. I only barely muster out a voice.

I had started it but Orsseine-san seemed to be smiling from the bottom of his heart, or was it just my imagination? Either way I take it that you are happy.

Right now, I am too surprised to be able to play the hypocrite confidently.

Chapter 15: Abnormality brings chances

It was a few minutes later that Greas-sensei and I recovered from the shock. Greas-sensei started looking back at me and the body clock that had stopped started moving.

Two people just stare at each other and share surprises and emotions. You can believe only at this moment.

Simply put, magic is amazing.

「How was it, try using it」

Clap*Clap*Clap* Hearing the sounds of both hands clapping we finally saw Oresseine-san
I'm sorry, I completely forgot about you.

「A ano, I as very surprised...but something, I was impressed....」

「Fu fu, it was my first time, but it was wonderful」

I do not know what I want to say, but apparently Greas-sensei seems to have been extremely moved.
I grasp the simulated wand with both hands and my eyes sparkle.

Anyhow, for the first time Greas-sensei acts suitable to his age.....

Because I am still a young girl, Greas-sensei will not say anything about my behavior, but now I feel like a boy to suit my age.

「Well, next is Maria-sama's turn?」

「Ah ... yes!」

U~u, I am nervous...!

I can see that I am sweating gently in the palm holding the wand.

I wonder if I will miss the moment to wave it. To fail because of hand sweat rather than grip strength....that is a subtle line for a young lady.

「Su~ Hah...」

Breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth.

Take a deep breath. It's okay, I am normal. You can do it if you think you can. I am a child who can do it by all means.

「.....」

I made up my mind and swung down with all the momentum.

— What happened in that moment.

「Eh—」

Funny, it was too late when I thought so.

A shock I could not endure flowed through my arm with a flash of light and I let go of the wand and fell on my backside.

After letting go of the wand, it was like it had it's own existence, Emphasis, it pulsed brightly as if saying that I should recognize it.

It's as if it were alive.

「Maria-sama.....!!」

Oresseine-san called out my name as I looked bad, but I could not react to it.

I was impatient. I was scared. I was confused.

I could not understand at all what was happening.

Just a single thought, why? Only doubt is running around my head.

I should have done the same thing as Greas-sensei, why was the result different? If this was an individual difference I could have laughed but from seeing Oresseine-san's reaction, this seems to be abnormal, not individuality.

The wand is repeatedly beating as if linked to my heart that gets furious.

「Maria-sama, here.....」

Oresseine-san is reaching out his hand while approaching here. Desperately, me, to protect Greas-sensei.

However, faster than that, the light that gave pain to the eyes disappeared as if sucked in, and the beating stopped.

A momentary silence spread as if nothing happened, but there is no reason to be relieved.

Because it is always quiet before the storm.

「.....! 」

A light is released that was too strong again, but I soon realized that it was not only shining.

For example, the moment before a bomb explodes and then the shockwave after the explosion.

Ah ... this is a mess.

「Maria!!」

「Eh.....!？」

Someone called me before my body was attacked.

My body was warmed up by something warmer than when someone said that voice or reply.

Finally, my sight became dark.

Chapter 16: Difference between love and goodwill is one character after all

The complicated thoughts is honest.

She.....she is a girl who is too small even to call a lady, but also she is too young to carry the name of a nobleman.

Even so, the girl named Mariabell was hard for me to deal with.

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The Sandria family collapsed and I suddenly became a commoner.

My father does not tell me the reason for the downfall, even if it was said that the house that fulfilled the duty of Duke has fallen, I heard that a successor was decided immediately, I can only assume that the sweet father of mine was deceived.

Because the Sandria family was one of the nobility's shallow history, was that why we were picked on? I could imagine many reasons, but it was all just a waste of time.

It does not cover the fact of our fall. As I complained that he was deceived, it is said that you were foolish and it is over.

More than that ... to me, the problem we had hanging in front of us was serious for our families.

A new home, a new job.

Our family borrowed a tattered unoccupied house to live in, without any other necessities other than a little cash which I kept at the house, and father begun to look for new work without any concerns.

It will be okay, I will manage somehow.

Now I think that way of thought was foolish. It was overly optimistic and naive.

But at that time, I really thought so. Not only for their child but as my parents.

You can be anything if you live, you can crawl up if you do your best.

Gentle parents who have hope and dream positive at any time, did not doubt and they believed that all the roads in this world were paved.

Even though there was no such thing.

My father's work was not decided at all, and my mother who was unable to open the house for child rearing also took me to search for work.

Running around while holding such a huge feeling, the work my father found was only a day job, my mother worked at a shop in the evening that also dealt in the night service business. Both are low-wage hard work, in a poor environment that does not think about people.

My parents who were born to aristocracy and lived as aristocrats and thought that only the inside of their beautifully decorated garden was the world, did not take long to suffer from heart problems.

And the year I was twelve years old, my father left this world. The cause was sleep deprivation, malnutrition, overwork, weaknessalthough I remembered many things, none had gone to the hospital so everything is only speculation.

Like my father, my mother's health drop and she became bedridden.

Only me left, I started working to feed myself and my mother.

Although I say that even my hard working adult father could only be employed as a day laborer, there is no reason for a child like me to get a job to earn two people's worth of living expenses.

Every day I seemed to die little by little. I do not have any confidence to live. I can only do what I see with my fingers while I feel my life is being scraped day by day.

Such a life for two years.

When I was age fourteen, the story of the tutor of the Tempest family's daughter Mariabell came.

It was impossible. Is it a lie or a dream, or is there something behind it? To be honest, there was only doubt and vigilance, but it did not become a reason for not eating.

Private tutors get high salary. Regardless of whatever backing, it is the base that you own. It cannot be any worse.

The work which I challenged with that mental attitude can also be said as desperate.....it was a good rush.

「Nice to meet you, I am Beruderia. Greas-kun.....you look a lot like Anessa-sama」

Anessa.....the woman who spoke my mother's name, the color of eyes is unique, but there is no place special other than that. However, it was a person who had the calmness and restraint unlike the nobles. I did not know what kind of connection she had with my mother, but my selection seems to have been because of her.

「You are Greas....I will leave my daughter to you from today」

The man, Asta Kirua, had such a beautiful face that it would even fascinate a male. The power which reminds me of cold ice sculpture, a head with no weakness.

It is almost impossible to believe that my former father was in the same position as him, the head had this definite atmosphere around him.

And the daughter who shares the same blood of those two became my student.

「Nice to meet you, Greas-sama.....I am Mariabell Tempest. From today, it will be a pleasure」

A girl who has a small body that is only half my size lowered a small head that fits the body said that with a solid tone that cannot be imagined from the age.

Soft purple hair like violets, the ring of angels representing its glistening texture. Round and big eyes that rise beautifully, they reminded me of a noble cat.

The strange eye color would be from the mother, but otherwise she resembles the head very much.

From the top of the head to the tip of the nail, a doll that produced the beauty together.....that is my first impression of Maria-sama.

Even after I began teaching, there was no change in impression.

As soon as I teach it she is able to do it. Even if not taught, she can still do it. Even so, she did not look down on me as a tutor.

Maria-sama was already very talented beyond her age.

To the extent that I do not need to do anything.

Surely this girl can grow easily without me. As much as I can teach, she can master it alone.

Judging from the level of the lesson, I should raise the difficulty of the lessons, I started to think so.

「The new subject I want to learn is magic」

Just a little more happy than usual, Maria-sama said.

Although magic is usually learned in middle school, there are also a few things that a private teacher teaches from preparatory to personal interests.

Therefore all the tutors have knowledge on magic more or less. It is not compulsory or rules, but normally.

But I am not that normal.

「Is it not okay?」

「It's not a no ... but I am an amateur about magic. I do not have enough knowledge to teach Maria-sama」

「Eh.....」

To my reply, Maria-sama looked surprised. If it was a tutor you would naturally think they have the knowledge. It is belief that is possible because it is a young girl, but unfortunately the result does not change.

「I'm sorry」

While apologizing, I was thinking about something different in my mind.

In the end, I'll be fired. Not just imbalanced with the competence of the student, but even when I cannot teach what you want, I can say that my existence value is zero.

In that case, I will not have to wait for a declaration.

「Let's get another tutor!」

That's good. You should get appropriate talent for this excellent girl.

Not through a connection or sympathy, but a person who can make their way here through ability. If the Tempest house is looking for recruitment, people would come swarming.

It is a pain to be out of work, and finding re-employment will be like going barefoot on thorn roads again, but even with only this month's salary, I will be able to manage somehow.

It's fine, I will just return to my original work. And I cannot tell you how to operate as a nobleman or getting fired will be the least of my worries. So with that in mind, I will give up already.

「I would like Greas-sensei to teach me」

Initially I thought that my greed was a hallucination. Next, Maria-sama's concern, compassion. But she denied it from the top.

「Learning magic is a good thing, I just thought that I could prepare before going to middle school. If I want to study seriously in the future, I will ask another teacher. That's why ... do not tell me that you will quit」

「Maria-sama.....」

[.....Of course, if Greas-sensei wants to quit regardless of magic, I cannot stop it]

The dignified attitude changed completely, Maria-sama who is twiddling her fingers while being small like before being scolded, this was more like a girl suitable for her age.

The area where the distinction between selfish and my wish is not connected, it seems that I can still grow up a little.

Surprised, impatient, then ... with a joyous laugh.

I thought it was cute. Pure, if you were my little sister is this what it would feel like?

Chapter 16: Difference between love and goodwill is one character after all (2)

It was a great word and I was happy to be honest.

But it was heartbreaking after all that Maria-sama could not learn magic. She said that she wanted me to teach magic, because it seemed to be more fun.

So I decided to confront the head.

「Ano..... toshu-sama」

「Nn?Greas? What's the matter?」

「Actually ... please, I have a request」

I want you to hire a magic tutor.

I could not deny the possibility that I will be fired, but, even so, I am hesitant to leave it. It would be best if you could hire a magic tutor in addition to me, but I immediately stopped because even if I imagine such a thing to ease my spirit the result would not changed.

The toshu-sama who heard my request said “I understood” after I manage to squeeze out my request properly.

As a result, I never got fired.

There was no new tutor coming.

Instead, Oresseine-sama, the head's secretary, taught me the basics of magic.

Why, also me?

「There is no loss in learning the foundation alone」

That being said, the head prepared my share of the teaching materials along with Maria-sama's share. I am sorry for the trouble, at least I thought that it should be deducted from my salary, but I was told that “One or two makes no difference “.

The only thing that is cool is the appearance, the contents are gentle and sweet. I was grasping to some extent that it may be because of okusama, but I never thought that it would be directed to myself.

Not only the head, but also the people of the Tempest family are gentle. Their legacy runs deep, and they are the noble family sitting in the position closest to the royal family, and yet they are completely different from the nobles I am familiar with.

They do not look down on the fallen former aristocracy. There is no pity.

I do not think sympathy was zero, but they will not try to impose excessive protection on me.

It was hard to deal with these kind of nobles.

I did not bear a grudge. Even though the period was short, I was also one of the nobles. I understand that it is a helpless thing in the first place to bear a grudge.

Still, I was not aware of what I felt for the “Tempest Duke Household”.

Nobility, and the family of the duke like the old me, I definitely should not like them.....or supposed to.

Okusama is the same as when we first met.

The head could not be judged by his appearance.

Maria-sama overturned everything I had once believed.

I was melted. I was changed. I was repainted.

It is irritable and uncomfortable, but I do not dislike it.

Complex state of mind along with complex feelings, and then it was the final magic lesson.

It will not be necessary to explain what happened there.

Just like me, Maria-sama waved the simulated wand but at that moment ...the air changed.

It is obvious from Oresseine-sama's reaction that the pulsing while emitting light is not a "good thing".

My crisis management ability sounded a warning tone. Maria-sama sitting with the wand on the ground should have recognized the situation that is happening.

I have to get away, or. I have to do something about the wand. Whatever action she took, there was time to judge.

But the abnormal situation cuts off our wish as if laughing.

Suddenly the pulsing light, stopped. A momentary silence.

To the "attack" that swelled out as if saying that it was the trigger, my body began moving according to my heart, not the brain.

「Maria!!」

I do not remember what I shouted.

Just the feeling of "What I must do" I pulled Maria-sama's arm and brought her to my chest.

Light and thin, small body. I recognized even more while embracing, a child's body temperature.

I have to protect you. To prevent you from getting hurt, I must protect you.

「—— !!」

In preparation for the shock, I put my strength into the arms that hugged Maria-sama. Grit my teeth and close my eyes tightly. I made up my mind and kept waiting for the approaching attack.

「.....h-, huh?」

Nothing came. An attack, accompanying pain, or even a shock.

I wanted to know the answer to the question mark around my brain, wanted to see what happened, and wanted security to say that nothing happened, I slowly opened my eyes.

I think the first thing I recognized was a bright orange color, Oresseine-sama's hair. Next gold color and violet color appeared side by side, did the head and okusama noticed the light and rushed over?

And the last thing is.....something transparent that surrounds me.

「Eh.....?」

What is this?

I see a rainbow from the reflecting sunlight through something like a film of soap bubble, but it looks solid like glass. It encloses me and Maria-sama who I was holding in my arms in a dome shape.

Looking at the ground, the grass was scattered around the dome wall and the soil was overturned.

「This.....」

Protected me?

There is no concrete evidence. But I felt that both me and Maria-sama were unharmed and the scars remaining on the ground were the proof.

I slowly reach for the membrane. Although it was an act of unconsciousness, before the fingers touched, the film flew away while emitting light.

What remained was the scarred ground and the unscathed.....me and Maria-sama.

「-Maria-sama!!」

I look at Maria-sama whose body was in my arms.

It is obvious that there is no consciousness, but I could not judge whether it is sleeping or fainting.

「Greas-san, excuse me」

「Oresseine-sa.....」

「.....It is fine, she is unconscious, but her pulse is normal」

Before I realized Oresseine-sama was in front of me and touched Maria-sama's neck, and smiled to the me who had an uneasy look.

And then, he took Maria-sama from my arms in one swift movement.

「Just to be sure, let's have a doctor check up on her. Greas-san does not seem to be injured, but please also take the examination just in case」

「Y-,Yes.....」

It seems that the situation is going to end, without knowing what happened.

Stroking the shoulders of the relieved me, the head approached next.

「Greas, are you not injured?」

「Y-,Yes. I am fine.....」

Okusama had accompanied Maria-sama, and her figure immediately disappeared.

Alone with the head..... to be honest, there is only tension. Even though I know the head is a gentle person, unlike his cool appearance, there is no way to say something anxious to the person who is a noble and my employer.

「Thank you. Maria was saved thanks to you」

「Eh... no, I just」

「No, it is thanks to you」

I have not done anything. I wanted to say so and the fact is right. It was not me that protected Maria-sama, it was that transparent membrane, I just acted with emotion.

Although I wanted to deny it, the head interrupted my words with a serious look.

「Maria was protected, thanks to your power」

「Eh..... a, ano, what?」

「The one who did that, was you, Greas」

「Shield barrier」

The remarks that came up have crossed my mental capacity quite easily.

I know that. I learned it in Oresseine's class. Literally, a shield that defends both magic and physical attacks.

But I cannot cast that.

「But toshu-sama, I cannot put out a defensive barrier. That is——」

「It is a magic that cannot be cast unless attributes are decided」

「.....」

That's right. Defensive barriers are not magic that can be used without attributes. Characteristics belonging to attributes, as said in history books 『Attribute Magic』.

There is no way the head of a nobility cannot know.

Then why did you say such a crazy thing?

「Attributes are not decided unless you learn from the school」

「That is true.....but with the knowledge I learned, it should not be enough to fix attributes」

In the first place magic can also be taught by tutors, but knowledge to fix attributes is not so easily taught. Knowledge of all attributes must be acquired, if you cannot even handle non-attribute magic then fixation of the attribute is a dream within a dream.

What I learned from Oresseine-sama is the foundation of magic. It is impossible to fix the attribute.

「If a non-attribute fixed themselves to a specific attribute, it will be a story. If it was originally fixed, the story is different」

「Originally.....fixed」

「It is a rare thing, but it is not unheard of」

What the head wants to say is about those who are born with attributes.

Everyone is unattributed when born.....that is the basic knowledge of magic, but there are rare occurrences of those being born who have specific attributes.

And I have that attribute.

「That defensive barrier belongs to the holy attribute.....there is no holy attribute in our house」

「.....I」

A person other than the Tempest family who was in that placethat is only me.

I have an attribute.....I cannot believe it, it's too unexpected rather than to say I do not understand it.

「Of course we cannot be sure if you do not officially inspect it.....but, there is almost no mistake」

「Then, what...what Oresseine-sama said」

「He was worried about injuries, but ... including “that” is what he meant.

「……Is that so」

What should I say? In this case, no matter what I said, I felt it would be correct and wrong.
Confusion, puzzled, and a little terror.

I should have survived the hell, but now I cannot see ahead of that time. A sense of fear that cannot be imagined at all.

「Are you alright?」

「Umm…… t-, toushu-sama」

As a sense of unseen fear welled up inside me, a feeling of a big hand rested upon my head.
Gentle, slightly warm, the movement that strokes my hair calms me down.
The pair of eyes I looked up into are vivid colors reminiscent of ice coldness, but in the depths is an absolute sense of security.

「There is nothing to worry about, leave it to me」

「Leave it to……but……」

「As a thanks for protecting Maria」

「Ah, that was me……」

I did it on my own.

Although I was lucky because I had an attribute, at the moment I just acted with emotion.

「Because Maria-sama……is important」

To those words the head had a complicated expression, but still gently stroked my head.

Chapter 17: The bad feeling was right unfortunately

When I open my eyes, I am behind the canopy of a light purple bed.

It was a very pretty room that was decorated in pink and white in the past but.....I am sorry, because I felt too restless from the girlish decorum I renovated it.

Now both my room and bedroom are based on a white accent color with diluted purple so it is not bothersome to the eyes, I think that it is a room that will not feel uncomfortable even if used by high school students.

Every piece of furniture accessories is elegant, but it is also refined, although the canopy bed I am using is neither normal or simple.

But it is within tolerance range than compared with before.

Anyhow, to escape from reality this much.

Why am I here?

「E —tto.....」

How far do you remember?

Today was Oresseine-san's last lesson, I had attend class with Greas-sensei without any problems.

So then Oresseine-san had us use magic with the simulated wand and Greas-sensei succeeded so it was my turn next — —.

「Ah —.....」

I remembered.....no, I did not forget it actually.

As soon as I shook the wand suddenly strange things happened, I thought that this was bad.....and fainted like that.

I did not think that such a thing could happen, but most of all the sense of delicacy of having fainted remained to me above all. Even though I fretted, I was not considerably injured.

「.....Hmm?」

Or actually, why am I completely unscathed?

I do not understand what that phenomenon is either. But that certainly had some “offensive power”.

I could not have avoided it when I fainted.

「At that time.....」

Everything was a blur and a shock, I remember thinking that it was inevitable death just before fainting.

I feel like I was called by someone.

Someone had called me, and I feel like I was caught in the arms.

The voice that remained in my ears, sounded familiar. It was the first time I had heard such a rushed tone in that voice, but still no mistake that voice belongs to.

「Greas-sensei.....?」

The voice was adult-like but much lower than my mother, and it did not have the dignified presence of father or Oresseine-san, it was still the voice of a child.

The owner of that voice that protected me was no mistake Greas-sensei.....probably.

「The voice called Maria.....」

I think that the last voice I heard was “Maria”.

But.....Greas-sensei calls me Maria-sama.

Even if I am his student, I am the daughter of a Duke whose is also the employer to Greas-sensei. So it was impossible to abandon, it was refused when I asked Greas-sensei about it.

Even at the beginning the compromise “Maria-sama,” was shown to be difficult. Initially it was “Maria ojōsama” and took a long battle before the compromise was reached.

.....So I suppose, it is not Greas-sensei? Or am I misunderstanding the words?

「Maria-chan! You’re awake!」

When I looked towards the voice of joy, my mother stood at the door of the bedroom.

U — n, it seems that my mother came into the room while I was pondering inside my head. She thought that I was not wake up and did not knock. She always does that when she comes to call me in the morning.

「The doctor said that you were all right, but I was worried. Does it hurt anywhere? Are you feeling sick?」

「I apologize for worrying you worry, okasama. It’s fine, it does not hurt anywhere and I do not feel unpleasant」

「Good.....wait a moment, I will call your father now」

My mother touched my cheek and shoulders, raising only the upper body and gave me a kiss on the cheek before leaving the bedroom.

When I think of the beginning, it has got much brighter.....it seems like a lie that I could not meet you.

Mother who went out with light steps returned shortly, but in the back was father and Oresseine-san with expressions of relief, and why is Greas-sensei also here?

No, there is no problem with Greas-sensei? He is probably worried about my injuries, troubled about the situation, and wanted to apologize, but.....what time do you think it is?

When I was in the courtyard the sun was still high up and bright outside, but now the sky is pitch dark, the stars and the moon sparkling in the sky. In other words, definitely nighttime. Not evening, but night. Do you not need to go home? Your parents, aren’t worried?

「Maria, good.....I was worried」

「Complexion looks good, I feel relieved」

「Father, Oresseine-san, sorry for making you worry. I am all right now」

My father stroked my head and Oresseine-san gave me a light palpation.

For some reason Greas-sensei is standing silently and keeping himself hidden behind the three adults

surrounding me.

He will not talk and he will not move. I cannot see his face hidden behind father, but there was nothing that seemed to be injured on the body seen from the gap, so I felt relieved.

「Maria, are you really feeling all right now?」

「Yes, my physical strength has recovered as I was sleeping」

「Is that so.....then, there is something we need to talk about」

「.....Yes, what is it?」

「It's not from me, it's from Greas」

Even though I thought that it was about the incident earlier and put on a serious attitude to show that I was listening.

I have become speechless to father who backed away plainly, and Greas-sensei cautiously came forward from behind my father's shadow.

Did you mean, I did something ...?

I think that Greas-sensei was the one who helped me. If you tell me that there is something from that person, I do not have a good feeling. Because I don't even remember what happened.

「Because we will take a seat outside, please tell me when it's finished」

「Yes, thank you very much」

「Eh, ano, wai-.....」

Why do we have to talk alone? Don't ignore my opinion!

There was no way I could say those words, so in the end I could only watch my father and the rest as they left.

「Even though you're sick, I'm sorry」

「No.....it is fine」

Even though you say "sick" I only fainted. I am unscathed, I slept and I recovered a lot and my body is doing fine.

The mental aspect is reverse though.

「Ano.....what did you want to talk about?」

「I will quit my job as a tutor today」

Chapter 18: Being a gate

「.....Eh? 」

Without grace or hesitation, the words thrown were too sudden to receive, I did not know what was said for a few seconds.

「J-, just now.....」

「As of today, I will quit my job as a tutor」

The reality does not change after hearing it again.

However, I just realized that I did not misheard him.

I did not have a good feeling, but this is too unexpected.

「What ...why...was it my fault?」

「It is different」

Could it be due to today's situation? Did you get hurt somewhere? Did I became hated because of this? Did you feel responsible?

A variety of bad thoughts flowed into my mind, but it was cut short by Greas-sensei's words. It was denied instantly.

I was relieved.....but then why?

「It's not Maria-sama's fault, it's also not because I am dissatisfied with this job. The reason is me」

「Eh.....?」

Greas-sensei explained to me who did not understand without any trouble.

What happened when I fainted?.

The fact then became clear there.

「You have an attribute?」

「I also did an examination, there is no mistake. I have a holy attribute」

「Holy attribute.....」

Certainly, the capture target Greas, who became a teacher has a holy attribute. It is not surprising that he has the same attribute like the him in the route.

But, I did not think it would become clear here.

When he became a tutor, I did predict the possibility of a different development from the time of auto mode....but this is another unexpected development.

「Since my attribute became clear, I decided to enter Avantor Academy. If I use the special enrollment system and scholarships, even I can attend without any problems.....toshu-sama has already completed the procedures」

「.....So, then tutoring」

「Yes. When I go to the school, in my case I will live in the dormitories.

Although Avantor Academy gathers students from all over the country, the Craine Kingdom is large. Yet the transportation methods are full of holes, there are trains and airships, but the number is small and the price is high. If you belong to the nobility you have a dedicated transportation method, but the commoners who enter as a special student does not have those.

Therefore, Avantor Academy is equipped with dormitories.

Of course not only commoners but also nobles can live in the dormitories, and although it is not a boarding system, most new students seem to prefer a dormitory every year.

I saw it when I was in auto mode, and it is a gorgeous facility. The eyes were cold, but Mariabell seemed to like it. It seems that you cannot judge one's person reaction from just their body.

The story diverted. In other words, Greas-sensei is saying that he will quit his job in order to attend school. If you live at the dormitories you will only be able to come back during the weekends and you will not have time to be a tutor.

If that is the case, it cannot be helped. I do not intend to protest, I will not say anything once I hear reasons that are too legitimate.

「Is that so.....it is a little disappointing, but it is a good thing. Congratulations Greas-sensei」

「.....Thank you very much」

Whether he was nervous or not, Greas-sensei's facial expression which was serious from the beginning relaxed. The same as usual, the face of a small child.

I wonder if he thought that I would lash out at him. If it is the Mariabell before, I do not know, but I will not do such a thing.

「.....Maria-sama」

「Yes?」

「I'm really thankful to you」

Lowering his head and words of gratitude for the second time. To me who kept my mouth closed because I did not know what it was for, Greas-sensei did not worry and kept on speaking.

「Thanks to Maria-sama, I got the chance to learn magic」

If you actually think about it, that's not the case.

Disappointing.....may be bad to say, but certainly those words should not be directed to me.

「That is.....incorrect It is not myself, but Greas-sensei's own power. I have not done anything」

The “cause” that revealed his holy attribute is because of me, but I should not be thanked by Greas-sensei for that.

「I am the one who was helped in that dangerous situation. I'm really thankful to you」

If Greas-sensei was not there, I do not know what would have happened to me. There are many unknown things about that phenomenon, but without Greas-sensei, there is no doubt that I would not be intact.

Besides, Greas-sensei is a key character next to the hero, who is a capture target and a hidden character.

Even if it was not revealed this time, it would probably be revealed somewhere else. Though I can't say that to the actually person.

And, as far as the emotional appreciation chapter is concerned.
I still have one thing to worry about.

「Greas-sensei, I still have one thing I am worry about」

「Yes, what is it?」

「When you helped me in the courtyard ... did you call me by my name, Maria?」

「Eh.....?」

Did you think I do not care?

It is definitely a trivial thing and I am not too bothered by it myself, but if he quits as my tutor, I will not see him for a while so I asked him now when I still had the chance.

Even if it does not matter much, just a bit, I heard a noise behind but before I turn could around I had fainted.

.....Who else could it have been.

「At that time....it was very chaotic.....I do not remember well」

He replied while avoiding my stare and his gaze wandered around, maybe he really does not remember.
And I am impatient about him not remembering.

The reason.....I imagine. Is because he declined once already.

「.....I am sorry if I did something rude but I really do not remember——」

「That is not it」

I managed to stop myself from holding my head, and interrupted his words.

Maybe I did possibly misheard or maybe not, and if not he possible could feel bad about breaking formalities.

But he does not need to apologize because I am not angry.

What I want to say is not that kind of thing.

「It's not like that....while we are on the topic, I thought if you could call me that way from now on」

「Oh ... that ...」

「Will you call me by just Maria?」

He once refused, I would like you to call me “Maria” instead of “Maria-sama” if possible.

Honestly, ojasama or Maria-sama and the likes.... I am not good with them. Because I do not have enough consciousness as a noble daughter, it is not easy to get accustomed with it, and if that person is older I just cannot get use to it.

Even though I was with Mariabell for the past five rounds, most of the time was spent bullying the “unworthy” noble daughters, and afterwards from an oppressor to the one being oppressed.

There was not a chance to learn the qualities of a noble daughter. If there was one thing I learned from Mariabell, it is that there is such a thing called “divine retribution”.

As expected, Oresseine-san and Anne and the rest of the maids will not abandon the [formalities]. It seems that it would affect their work over there.

In comparison, I prefer Keito or anyone who does not get caught up with the formalities so much. Also Keito's father calls me "Maria-chan".

「But.....that is」

「Furthermore, you are no longer my tutor, correct?」

I am no longer the child of his employer, as my father is no longer Greas-sensei's employer. I feel that gratitude has something to do with it, but that part is already through.

In truth, I should respect Greas-sensei who taught me as his "student".

「Is it not okay?」

「.....」

I am troubled. I feel guilty feeling that I am interfering with something really embedded in his conscience. I had no intention of doing that, but Greas-sensei seems to have deep feelings of gratitude towards me.

How long has this silence continued? In the end, it was Greas-sensei who broke it.

「Ma.....ri-a.....」

「.....!」

「Maria.....」

It was barely audible, but it was certainly my name that I heard.

I am happy, I held my breath, one more time to confirm. The second time I heard it properly, Greas-sensei himself is feeling confused. Although it did not make a sound, the mouth was moving "sama". But that's acceptable. Compared to being downright denied, there is nothing wrong.

「.....I am happy, thank you very much!」

「No, it's not a big deal, but.....it did feel somewhat strange」

「Ufufu」

Although he was a bit troubled, Greas-sensei smiled happily along with me.

I am somewhat lonely, but I know that this is not a goodbye. My dark history will only increase if I cry and play the part of an emotional separation.

Calmly, but not coldly, he said, with an amiable feeling like going on a trip.

「Take care, Greas-sensei」 .

「.....I'm going, Maria」

And in the end, Greas-sensei left for the school.

After I parted with Greas-sensei, I know the next time we meet we will have a lot to talk about.

「……mother?」

「Delia-sama? 」

「As I thought, you were with Keito-kun」

The rare visitor who appeared smiling as usual was mother. Delia-sama, it is the nickname Keito calls my mother by. At the beginning he called her okusama, but my mother told him that she was fine with him calling her auntie, in the end it was finally settled on Delia-sama.

「I thought you would be here at this time. I am sorry that I interrupted your study」

「No, because it's over」

「Because Maria couldn't concentrate anymore」

「Keito!」

Do not say unnecessary things! Close your mouth!

「Fufu, you two really are good friends. Maria-chan there is something I want to talk about though」

「To me?」

That is unusual.

It is not unusual to talk, it is unusual for mother to go out of her way to visit the rose garden to talk.

There is a rose garden at our house, the person who maintains it is Keito's father, and the owner is my father, but my mother seems to like the courtyard better than here and comes only when we are with someone in the rose garden.

As we will have dinner together, even if she has something to say it could just be done there.

Is it urgent? She does not appear to be in a hurry then ... what is it?

「What is it?」

「Actually, the date of the second prince's birthday party was decided」

「Eh……」

The second prince I found blood clung to that word.

The second prince, the number two prince, the second in line to succeed the throne. Such a person, there is only one person in our country. I know, I remember, I'm a person who wants to forget it.

I cannot help it because I want to close my ears to my mother's words. I do not want to hear the words that follow.

The peace that I regained is threatened once I hear it.

I know, I understand……that I cannot ignore it.

「It's next week, but Maria-chan is going to join us as well because they invited you!」

「Is that so……」

While making a smile only at my mouth I thought at that time somehow I need to find a way to fall sick by next week.

Sorry to say but I am scared. I will apologize so come back peace.....!

Chapter 20: Dona, Dona

There is a main hero in this Otome game.

Like in any anime or manga likewise the same in this game, from the plenty of capture targets and individual routes, the story is made up of multiple routes of each person, finally, at the end is the extreme satisfaction of winning for the heroine. He is drawn largely on the promotional arts, or introduced as a character second to the heroine. The prince who has the absolute perfect and flawless specs. That is the main hero of this Otome game. See the cf. of Mariabell Tempest for more info.

And the main hero of “LinaLia” is Runa Vi Leonova. The person with the second highest succession rights in the Craine Kingdom, in other words yours truly the second prince

The thing that I want you to remember here is the birthday party of the second prince, which I will attend next week.

Second prince’s birthday party.

The second prince, Runa Vi Leonova.

The main hero “Runa Vi Leonova”.

The mere thought of him nearly reversing the contents in my stomach, please keep that a secret.

× × × ×

After speaking with my mother, my study session ended because I couldn’t focus anymore.

I sat on the sofa in my room and remembered the death sentence I just heard.

「The 10th anniversary party celebrating the birth of Prince Runa.....」

In short it is a party commemorating Prince Runa’s 10th birthday. I hate how they have to talk in such a roundabout way. What’s with the 10th anniversary party? Do that when you are 20 years old at least. You could celebrate adulthood.

「Ojosama, it’s about time for dinner soon」

「Ah, yes, I’m going now」

I think that the Anne who speaks to the me who is muttering darkly under my breathe without any hesitation is a strong person. From the side it probably looked like something straight out of a horror movie.

Well it is a mystery whether she even has the feelings called “fear”.

There is a new fact that I learned from my magic studies.

The total number of servants in this house is 23 people. There are seven men including Oresseine-san, and the gardener Keito’s father, five women including Linda-sensei.

And all the remaining ten are classified as maids, but they do not have the concept of gender.

The ten people are not human beings but are magical tools.

At first glance they do not look any different from humans, but when they remove their clothes there was an indirect joint like an mannequin, when I first saw it I cried unintentionally and embraced my mother. Like a moving mannequin straight from a horror movie.

They wear dressed in maid dresses, have the same power as men, and can do the work without

sleeping. Of course since it is a magical tool, if the magical power runs out, it will cause the battery to die.

And all of them are terribly beautiful, but also terribly unsociable.

Even if it looks human, there is no muscle or internal organs, in other words there are no facial muscles.

Do you remember when I thought that I was disliked by the servants in the past? Because the nomen maids kept crushing all opportunities to meet mother.

The reasons is because of them.

The three maids currently accompanying me “Anne” “Du” “Torowa” They would not fold no matter what I did and broke my spirit many times.....I will never forget the day I learned about them from Oresseine-san. It is trauma rather than memories.

However, I was glad that I could prove that I was not disliked. Above all, when I understood that they would overlook eccentric conducts.....I was relieved from the bottom of my heart.

These girls, they are good at hiding their presence. The ability of appearing and disappearing unexpectedly.

When I thought that they were ordinary nomen maids, I could not voice any complaints even though it was in my room.

But now it is nothing even if I grumble about in my room!

..... It is better if there is no content to grumble about.

「Mother, father, I kept you waiting」

It seems that my father and mother were already in the dining room waiting for me.

They may have waited a long time since I took refuge from reality and it was quite late.....

「Fufu, I just arrived here as well so it's fine」

「The food will not run away so there is no need to hurry」

「Yes, thank you very much」

The two smiled back as I sat down on the seat.

The dishes arranged on the table are as usual, everything seems to be delicious.

「Well then, let's begin」

「Itadakimasu」

「Itadakimasu.....」

I put both hands together and start eating. Ever since my father and mother reconciled, dinner has always been very pleasant.

Today, it sounds like the devil 's voice inviting me to hell.

「By the way, Maria, did you hear about Prince Runa's birthday party already?」

It came —!

「.....Yes, I heard」

That's right, so this is where the talk will be heading, but I apologize father because I will divert you with my full power.....!

Although it was impossible to do such a thing, so while crying on the inside I nodded with the pretense of serenity.

「So you want to go after all. I was going to wait till dinner to tell you, but someone ended up telling you in advance」

「B-because.....I wanted to tell her as soon as possible」

What a heartbreaking thought.

Mother, thank you for always being so kind. But this time I am not pleased at all.....!

「At the time of Soreiyu-sama's birthday party, Maria-chan could not go because of her physical condition. That's why I thought this time.....」

Eh, sorry, what time are you talking about? Let me try to remember.....Un, no memories.

Falling sick and being unable to attend Soreiyu-sama's birthday party this is the first time I have heard of this.

Soreiyu-sama is Prince Runa's older brother, the first prince. By the way he could be a source of destruction for me, he is a cautionary person equivalent to the capture target.

In Runa's route, Mariabell collaborated with Soreiyu and tried to tear up the relationship between Karen and Runa. Soreiyu who had his eyes on Karen's reinforcement magic tried to make her his bride and Mariabell who wanted Prince Runa for herself.

Accomplices with aligned interests, they formed a plan, the plan was carried out and their destiny sealed.

After they did so, Mariabell was exiled from the country along with Soreiyu, and then in end she would be betrayed by Soreiyu, and what awaits her next is death. Whatever happens I only have a one-way ticket to hell available.

I think it is only because I became Mariabell, but isn't this too brutal for an Otome game? Or is it because of Mariabell's excessive personality? Either way I am not hateful.

「Three years ago there was a ten-year anniversary party commemorating Soreiyu's birth. But Maria-chan ended up getting a cold.....I felt sorry that you couldn't go, so I did not tell you」

「That's right」

To the me three years ago, good job. Although I did not know it was still nice timing.

Ah, is it possible I used up all my luck that time? So this time it is flowing in the direction of attendance?

In terms of not wanting to be involved, I do not want to be involved with Soreiyu, but that doesn't mean Runa is within tolerance level either. I do not want to meet either.

「Ano, mother I——」

「What would you like to do for your new dress? Maria-chan also grew bigger and I think we should make it feel a little more mature this time」

「I will leave it to Belldelia. We can talk to Oresseine, so we should make arrangements tomorrow」

「Yes! 」

They seem to be having a lot of fun. I cannot say I do not want to go. Imagining my mother's face the moment I say.....my heart dies.

While imagining the design of my dress, to the mother who is laughing happily more than usual, 「I do not want to see Prince Runa because I do not want to go!」 I do not have the heart of steel to bring myself to say that. In the first place if I had such mental fortitude, even if I met Prince Runa I would be able to manage somehow.

My heart is not glass, but it's only about the strength of plastic.

「It will be fun right, Maria-chan! 」

「.....Un, that's right」

For the first time I felt that I understood the feelings of the calf in Dona, Dona. (*ED: Dona, Dona is a Yiddish song about a calf being led to slaughter*)

Chapter 21: Encounter Rate

I want to catch a cold. Though I was being serious, there is no way it could go so well. More than anything, I'm pretty durable. As long as there isn't some sort of epidemic going about I can run around with full energy.

I thought about pretending to be sick for an instant, but before a doctor.....I need to be able to get past Oresseine-san first. It is easy to tell from my face, and Oresseine-san is surprisingly sharp.

While thinking about what to do, time went on, and before I noticed the party was on the next day. Right now I am with mother in the middle of a final check of the dress and accessories which my mother chose.

「Maria-chan, are you alright?」

「Eh.....?」

「You seem to not be very well these days, did you get into a fight with Keito-kun?」

「No, that's not the case」

Rather than fights, I give complaints one-sidely.

I do not want to go, I do not want to see him, I cried out 「I don't want to go but I have to go」 then came back, even though I was able to voice my opinions I still couldn't avoid it.

If there weren't any difficulties, I would do it!

「If so, that's fine.....If you feel sick, tell me right away」

「Understood」

It is not a physical condition but I feel absolutely horrible!

If I actually mention this, I will not have to go tomorrow. Mothers will definitely allow it if I do not like it, and I understand that.

But I cannot say that. I know what I should and should not say, because I am a noble after all.

As an upper aristocracy, and as a daughter of the Duke Tempest, I cannot help but to attend the commemorative birthday party of the royal family. Moreover, because this time I also received a direct invitation with my name, it is even harder to avoid.

I am not happy about celebrating about people I have never even met before.....royalty and nobles are definitely troublesome.

「.....Un, it looks nice. Is it not too tight?」

「It's fine」

A gray dress close to white that complements the color of the hair. The thick ribbon wrapped around the waist is pretty, but just the design itself I feel is probably the most mature dress I have worn thus far. There are few frills and laces, but there is no volume on the long skirt.

Un, this seems easy to move in.

「Let's tie your hair higher on the day. Because there will be a lot of people, it should be cooler」

My hair is easily brought together and tied to the top of the head. Suddenly having nothing obstruct the back of my neck, a cool air brushed against it.

The temperature itself is not hot yet, but if it is the royal birthday party it can easily be predicted that a large number of people will come. Moreover, this time is the 10th anniversary, it will be bigger than an ordinary birthday party, alongside me other noble children being invited is highly likely.

.....Hmm?

It seems like I just noticed something extremely critical that I did not want to notice—

「Ah.....!!!」

「Ah, did it hurt?」

「N-no it's fine」

「Well, this should work for tomorrow. Good job, Maria-chan」

「Y-, Yes. Well then, mother, I will go take a bath」

Alright.....well then the dress for Anne」

「Excuse me!!」

I held the hem of my dress aside and jumped out of my room without listening to my mother's words. The other side is not the bath but my room.

「Ojosama, are you going to take a bath?」

「Later!」

Anne who was pursuing my suspicious behavior, because right now I am not in the bathroom.

I entered the bedroom and pulled out the side table drawer next to the bed and start rifling through it.

The objective is my precious information notebook.

Flipping through the notebook to the name and information written on the pages, I lose strength in my legs and collapse to my feet.

What I wrote was two people's names and information.

Tuvalu Miranda, the son of the Marquis

Niel Juliano, son of the Count

「I knew it.....」

All remains of hope collapse. The name and the family's social standing are the basic information that I wrote down before, there is no mistake.

Why did I not notice sooner?

If I had noticed sooner I would have tried to get sick with all my might.

The Royal family, a party to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the birth of the prince.

If the party is at the scale where the Duke's daughter is invited by name, then there are no reasons why the other capture targets would not be invited.

Chapter 22: Hope is easy, reality is lunatic

It will be such a thing to say that I am shocked. Prince Runa and Prince Soleil and now the other capture targets, my head hurts.

Tuvalu and Niel, both of which are capture targets, the contents of their route are the complete opposite.

Niel, the youngest child of the Count, his character setting is dark. A typical example of a bullied child who is always nervous, weak and easy to understand. A character with fluffy moss-green hair down and round emerald green eyes, a cute and good-looking bishonen, but hides behind his long bangs and thick glasses giving him an overall impression of a gloomy character.

The reason is because of his parents. His two older brothers who have already debuted in society are very talented, and Niel who was originally shy, grew up always being compared to them.

You are useless, completely worthless, a disgrace.

Being doused in abusive language almost everyday, Niel's heart was broken apart and he lost all confidence.

Under those circumstances the heroine comforts him, cheers him on, and Niel gradually regains his brightness.

So far it seems like a bitter-sweet romance story of a tragic bishonen and a bishojo who healed his heart.....but now enters the infamous villainess Mariabell you are all familiar with.

Seeing the beautiful appearance of Niel which became apparent after his restored confidence, she disliked the closeness of the two people and tore them apart.

Just about that time, Juliano succeeded in securing a relationship with the Tempest house.....Un, Mariabell absolutely did something, the timing is too good.

And soon Niel married the heroine afterwards, breaks away from his parents and succeeded as a novelist and achieved a happy ending. And they lived happily ever after. In the bad end, Niel was torn apart from the heroine, and throws himself into the sea after he was forced to marry Mariabell.

Me? In the happy ending, my downfall is announced in the epilogue, in the bad ending, Niel's older brother places various criminal charges on me and I am executed.

It is the set end path of a villain. But I do not remember feeling a sense of impending crisis for Niel. It is true that her ending is not bright as usual, but his game route is somewhat gentler compared to others because of his personality. Though it was also said because she appeared the least in his route

And then Tuvalu's route goes in the opposite direction.

To be honest, his route is really scary. I thought Greas-sensei was the one I did not want to get involved with the most, but let me correct that. He is the one I do not want to get involved with the most.

If Niel's route is white, then Tuvalu's route is black. No, it may be red.

Because his route is said to die the most, or have the most deaths. Of course, including me.

Tuvalu Miranda is the son of the marquis, or is considered to be the only son.

Actually, however, he is even lower than a commoner, so essentially a slave.

Tuvalu's mother is a prostitute whom Marquis Miranda kept, and she gave birth to a girl two years after she gave birth to Tuvalu. The father of course is Marquis Miranda.

However, Marquis Miranda threw out Tuvalu's mother as soon as the daughter was born. Parent and children who were thrown out of the household and abandoned on the roadside, their social position drop down to slaves. Forced to live in the slums, his mother died and his sister was also sick from the harsh conditions.....in such a situation, an incident arise that the sole heir of Marquis Miranda died.

Only one successor, his only son. Then Marquis Miranda remembered.

The existence of a boy given birth by a prostitute, Tuvalu. Tuvalu was his son, so he tried to make him his heir.

Of course, Tuvalu hated it.

Even if I can become a nobleman, I do not want to live with the culprit that caused us all this suffering. However, Tuvalu has a sister who was sick.

In exchange for medicine for his sister, Tuvalu will enter the Miranda household.

And thus the Marquis' son, Tuvalu Miranda, was born.

It is already pretty dark so far. And thus Tuvalu who was good in the past, became a twisted character. What was it called.....Yandere? I have never seen the "dere" part of a yandere but that's just my impression.

After entering the Miranda household, he became something like the childhood friend of the prince, his meeting with Karen is also because she was originally a woman involved with Prince Runa.

Just because you are the prince, do you need to go that far because of your childhood friendship? I would not do such a thing for Keito.

I think that you understand that Tuvalu's "affection" is heavy at this point.

Incidentally, Tuvalu's route is derived from the route of Prince Runa. Because she is associated with Prince Runa to a certain extent, she appears like a sister-in-law to Tuvalu.

And from that point trying to capture Tuvalu.....yes, it was a pleasant surprise.

Just when Tuvalu and heroine start to become close, Marquis Miranda orders him to be engaged with Mariabell. I absolutely dislike this idea, but only this me.

In Tuvalu's route, Mariabell is jealous of his sister and plans to kill her and Karen. Although I did not believe she would, you seriously did it, Mariabell.

In the happy end the assassination failed, and Mariabell was arrested for attempted murder. In the bad end the assassination is successful, and she is murdered by Tuvalu who was taken over by revenge at the lost of the heroine and sister.

Really scary. I am scared of both the happy and bad ending. Even in auto mode there was still fear. Besides, how did I forget such a troublesome guy.....!

「I will die tomorrow.....」

Of course, I mean mentally rather than physically.

× × × ×

It passes overnight, and I'm in despair.

I thought overnight, but I could not think of Runa and Tuvalu countermeasures. Thoughts about Niel have already disappeared from my mind.

Runa alone is difficult enough but now also Tuvalu.....it is impossible, I hope the difficulty level is easy!

「Maria-chan, are you ready?」

「Yes, please enter」

「Excuse me.....ma~a, as I thought it suits you!」

「Un, beautiful Mariabell」

Anne who changed my clothes and did my hair withdraws. After the knock, my father and mother came in when giving permission.

Both of them praise me very much, but from my point the two people are amazingly surprised.

Although it is a birthday party, the one being celebrated is the prince, the clothes corresponding to the level of the ceremony. Even the modest mother is dressed lavishly today.

Both of them do not seem to have a child of nine years old.

「Kirua-sama, the carriage is ready」

「I'm coming now」

I could not return a smile to father who said “Well then, shall we go”.

I wanted to cry at the recklessness of going to the battlefield unarmed.

Chapter 23: Does not cover the characters?

Upon arriving at the venue I had a nauseating feeling....to put it briefly, it was disgusting. It is the royal family and as expected there is a castle. My house is a mansion because I am part of the aristocracy, but compared to royalty it is inferior.

However, even so, I did not think that the venue would be wide to the point you couldn't even recognize from end to end!

[.....]

Dumbfounded, dazed, startled. My current feeling can be expressed in those three words. As if pushing away reality, the glittering chandeliers are too dazzling to be seen in reality, Is this bullying?

My father and mother are busy with greetings, and it seems that the other nobles are doing the same. As I notice children are children, they were settled in a corner with desserts and juice.

It is a buffet style, but seemed to be tailored towards the older guests, it is difficult for children to reach the food and adults are absolutely necessary. Besides, children like sweets more than rice, maybe. At least I got attracted to the cake.

As of now, neither Prince Runa nor Prince Soleil, and neither Tuvalu nor Niel have emerged yet. The prince will be busy, although there are less children than adults, the children are also numerous.

.....Cake, is it okay to eat?

Sweet and gorgeous, the delicious cake in front of me was very hard to resist. Because, Mariabell is nine years old!

[.....nnm]

The cupcakes I tried were very tasty. It was brilliant pink but.....it cannot be judged from its appearance. I am the one who chose it though.

As is expected of a royal party, there seem to be no flaws.

Cookies, macaroons, financiers, cream puffs. Because I cannot eat so much, I take them all one by one and check the condition of the dish.

[Is there no brownies?]

I want to eat something chocolaty. If there are this many kinds of desserts, it has to be here somewhere.....I do not want to move around much if possible.

Because I want to avoid the dangers I'm going to meet by keeping a low profile.

[It is really a strange eye color]

[.....Hmm?]

My heart skipped a beat when I heard a voice nearby when I was looking for desserts.....maybe, I think that it was directed at me.

The voice came from a group of seven girls staring at me with their arms folded. Rather than saying all seven of them, there is a feeling that the child in the center is keeping the other six people remaining.

What to say.....it is a deeply familiar scene.

Mariabell, the high school student, also brought her followers around like this to scorn and bully Karen.

It looked like a bad bargain sale. It is economical to say it is a bargain sale even though it is a noble. Of course it is ironic.

「Tempest household's reijo, Mariabell-sama correct?」

「Yes, but.....pardon me, who are you?」

The eyes of the surroundings rise to my words.

Eh, what, this is my first time meeting this person. Either way I am uneasy that she knows my face and name, do not miss the question mark!

「My name is Francia Cetone Tigerson, a branch of the royal family」

Branch.....is it like relatives of Prince Runa? The face is not very similar, and the hair color and so on are also different though.

Prince Runa and Prince Soleil have silver hair, but this.....Francia-sama is blonde. The curls do suit her well though.

Ah, the eye color is the same blue. But blue eyes are common, so it does not become a criterion of judgment.

The age may be older than me, no maybe even older than Prince Runa. It is difficult to judge from looks, but in terms of height, perhaps.

I thought quite carefully, but what does a royal branch family member want with me?

「I've heard about you. You contributed to the discovery of a natural-born attribute」

Natural-born attribute, the incident with Greas-sensei?

Attribute possession is rarely found before admission to middle school, I guess it can't be helped that there was some rumors.....I was the cause rather than making a contribution.

I feel like I'm being wronged.

「Not so.....rather, I was the one helped by him」

「Ara, is that so?」

That's right.

Rumors will not be entirely correct, at least it must be corrected for the amount heard directly. I don't really know how to explain it, even I can't make head or tails of it.

Francia-sama who listened to my words nodded many times as if she understood, and then laughed. Somehow.....I know this laughter.

「Because everybody evaluated it very highly, but as I expected.....a rumor is a rumor」

Ah.....I remembered.

This expression, this tone, I also know it very well.

「After all, it is a person who draws blood from the Wimbuto family」

This is the expression Mariabell makes when she looks at the heroine, the tone of the expression when talking with the heroine.

When insulting and laughing at the person.

「It was someone who also has the same blood as the Duke, but I see it was wrong of me to get my hopes up」

From the center, Francia-sama approaches me one step.

Bending her waist slightly and aligning eyes with my mine, the mocking smile disappears, and a scornful look replaces it.

「Really, those are truly disgusting eyes」

Chapter 24: Perfect Skill

To those words, I remember words that Mariabell said to the heroine.

Retribution, what goes around comes around, serves her right She had abused and mocked in front of my eyes, I knew that she was the worst villainous daughter, that Mariabell had brought herself to the lowest.

In truth, she was doing such things very often.

「To expose such eyes in the public, If the blood of the Tempest family were inherited even a bit more, there would be no reason to show such things on Runa-sama's memorable birthday」

She has a sharp tongue. A person who has no problem belittling others, she looks exactly like Mariabell.

A child grows up looking at their parents. I have already grown to a certain extent so it doesn't really apply to me, but I guess they watched their parents.

Those earlier words were directed at mother and the Wimbuto house. In other words, these girls.....

No, Francia-sama's parents disapprove of the marriage between mother who is the daughter of the Earl and father, the Duke. These "eyes" of mine, I often carefully observe my surroundings with them and learn.

Ma~a, I am a noble after all, though I think that the social status is annoying. Especially since father and mother have differences not only in their status but also in their appearances. I like mother, but if I think objectively she is definitely not gaudy and is very quiet. Because my father is showy, I can understand it very well.

However, to actually attack me.

Is it because she is a royal family branch.....so the duke house means nothing?

Ma~a, it doesn't really matter.

「I actually rather like my own eyes」

「.....So your taste is also bad, how pitiful」

What kind of reaction did you expect?

I had neither started crying nor bawling, but on the contrary my face had not changed and it seemed Francia-sama was unsatisfied by that.

Did you wanted me to start crying or screaming, or did you want me to get angry? Anyhow, I think that she wanted to see some kind of reaction to her words.

But I apologize, I have lived five times as a villainess after all.

I do not know what you were expecting, but I will not break down from merely just that.

「Even if my eyes disgust Francia-sama, that cannot be helped. I cannot control how other people feel after all」

In fact, I think that it cannot be helped if I am disliked. If I did something I can apologize, but if you do not like my appearance, I cannot do anything about it. There is no way to change it, so there is nothing that can be done but to put up with her disgust.

This is not really a big deal if compared it to a death flag. I was surprised by her incomprehensibility, but that's all.

「Anyhow, if my eyes are unpleasant, that's fine. Please do your best not to put me in your sight」

Finally, I finished with a smile. With the meaning of saying this is the end.

It will become a fuss if I do not finish it quickly. We are in the middle of where children are gathered, moreover, my eyes have started becoming sore because it is one to seven.

My only goal is to finish today without drawing attention, so why should I risk it over such a trivial matter?

「If that is all, please excuse me」

Moving lightly, I turn my back to Francia-sama and her party.

Elegantly and quietly, like nothing had happen.

The feeling of glares behind my back must just be my imagination.

Ah, I forgot to find brownies.....

× × × ×

To avoid any gazes, I sit in one of the chairs lined up against the wall. In order to enjoy the snacks I picked, I chose a place not far from the gathering of children, but as unnoticeable as possible.

There is still space on the dish meant for the regrettable brownie, but there is not enough courage to return there.

Placing the dish on the side table, I start with a cookie, macaroons and financiers are also delicious.

As expected of a royal party, all of them are superb!

Since quantity and quality were not a problem I ate well, the last cream puff I ate was a double cream filled with custard and white cream.

It was delicious, there was no brownie, but it was still highly satisfactory.

But after eating so many sweets, I am thirsty.

「I wonder if there is any tea.....」

If possible, crude tea is good, but that will not be here as that is said to be a commoner drink. Because juice was too high in sugar content, it seemed to make you even thirstier.

Straight tea would even be passably at this point.

「Here, please」

「Eh.....?」

I wanted to dispense the dish and was about to stand up while thinking so. At that moment I heard a voice.

Because I was in the process of brushing off my skirt, I raised my face.

First of all, a pure white tea cup was in front of my eyes. Only the rim was bordered by a soft blue, it was a simple but elegant design.

Next, a light blue color.

A color reminiscent of water from the sky, the question of how my inner thoughts were known, had me at a loss for words.

「W-what.....?」

「Because it seemed like you wanted tea, if you do not mind」

「No, ano, that's not it.....!」

Why are you talking to me so causally?

It's the first time we met! And, if possible, it would have been better if we did not meet! Of course I meant for me.

「……Ah, I apologize, it was rude of me to not introduce myself first」

That person smiled and placed the teacup on the side table and brought his hand to his chest and lowered his head.

「I am the son of Marquis Miranda, Tuvalu Miranda」

Chapter 25: Is god the abbreviation for god of plagues

Explain, someone, now, explain the situation!

There is no one who will hear no matter how much I shout in my mind.

But how, there was no shadow or shape until a while ago.

Just because I was absorbed in sweets and did not notice? That's stupid.

「……Mariabell-sama, are you feeling alright?」

「Ah, yes. My name is Mariabell Tempest」

I was too agitated and had just stared at Tuvalu. Suspicious.....or rather, I was seen with a troubled smile but finally pulled myself together.

I am currently unsettled, but before that I am a noble and this is a social gathering. It is impossible for me to disregard him after he introduced himself.

In a hurry, I brushed my dress lightly and lowered my head.

「I know. You are the daughter of the Tempest house, and a very talented person」

「No, I am.....」

「You also handled that previous incident well」

「.....」

I thought whether he meant the same thing as Francia-sama. About contributing to the discovery of an attribute. So I tried to deny it, but I couldn't return anything to the next words he said with an ambiguous smile.

Did you saw what happen, a moment ago. I was aware of my surroundings, but I did not think that Tuvalu was nearby.

Maybe I should not count on my wariness so much.

「……Did you come to say just that?」

I do not know if it was in disgust or a praise, but if that is all hurry up and leave.

「No, I was just asked to play the role of mediator with you」

「 Mediator.....?」

A mediator role. A person who acts as a go-between to resolve the conflicts of two parties.

.....I only have a bad feeling.

「Tuvalu, do not mind me」

「Runa.....I told you to wait until I called」

A silver-haired boy with blue eyes appeared from behind Tuvalu.

In a place called a party where people dress up and gather, a person shining above everyone else, the person everyone is giving their blessings to and also today's leading role.

Runa · Vi · Leonova

「.....」

As a noble, when there is a prince before your eyes, the proper actions to take in this situation would be to lower your head and give your blessings, but I'm sorry, my head has yet to return.

It feels as if the air has been drained from the surroundings.

However, there is no doubt that it is quite a bad situation in my assumption.

While talking with Tuvalu, Prince Runa's eyes does not leave me, and if I turn my back and run away I will surely be killed. Killed for Lèse-majesté or something; probably.

「Miss Mariabell Tempest」

「Wa, yes!」

Do not call me so suddenly, it's bad for my heart.

「It seems one of my relatives said something rude a while ago」

「Relatives.....you mean Francia-sama?」

「Yes」

Tuvalu also, but how do you know? You were not near that time, were you?

「Those who were watching the scene told me」

What an unnecessary thing.....!

I almost clicked my tongue unintentionally. I didn't though.

In front of the prince, and I am a lady, there are many reasons why it would be bad if actually clicked my tongue.

「I apologize in place of Fran, I am sorry」

「No, it's not a big deal.....there is no need to bother Runa-sama over such a matter」

Or actually, I'm sorry but please do not do anything unnecessary.

It would attract even more attention if I let the prince personally apologize to me.

.....no more attention please.

「It's not a big deal? But.....I heard that not only just Mariabell-sama, but also your mother was mentioned」

The person who reported to these two people, just how much did you say?

Francia-sama's voice was not loud, but it was not small either, but she was aware of her surroundings though.

She is a branch royal family member, so even if she said some things it shouldn't be that much of a problem.....why bother to even tell these two people. Choose an adult, though it would have been much better if you had just forgotten about it.....!

Tuvalu and Prince Runa are turning their eyes in doubt.....but this feels like it won't be resolved unless I say something.

「.....I was told something about the color of the eyes」

Though I toned it down considerably it's not a lie. In truth the main topic was about the color of the eyes. Something about lineage....but to be frank I wasn't really paying attention.

「It is true that Mariabell-sama's eyes are an unusual color」

「Even so, it should not be condemned」

.....I wonder why, there is a great sense of incongruity when your targets of fear stand up for you. It is a nice thing, but somehow....it is surprising.

「I do not mind, so both of you please do the same」

「But.....」

「Values differ by person. Whether you see my eyes as beautiful or as eerie, I will leave it to you. I myself like this color, so it does not matter what other people think」

So please do not object, to be honest it is annoying how blown out of proportion this is.

「Therefore, Prince Runa please do mind either」

Keeping up this smile is getting hard. At the same time, my throat is getting dry.

If I drink the tea you brought....Un, I feel useless. It seems to exist for me, but it is something Tuvalu brought.

Everything is fine so please leave quickly.

「But——」

「Runa, how about leaving it 」

The one who threw out a life ring, Tuvalu

It was unexpected, but good job!

「If word gets out that a branch family member made an absurd remark to the daughter of the Duke.....I do not know what kind of commotion it will make. Fortunately the King and other adults do not seem to be aware yet」

Good! Just like that! Put a stop to the feelings of Prince Runa!

「.....I do not like leaving it like this」

「I know, however, if we continue it will be inconvenient for Mariabell-sama」

But do not mention me.....!

「Even if you judge Francia-sama's actions, it should be done with the consent of Mariabell-sama. But she does not want it」

「.....I understand」

Although he did not seem satisfied with how the situation ended, Tuvalu seems to have succeeded in persuading Prince Runa.

Thank you, I feel like my positivity has risen a little. But because it was already negative to begin with it now equals zero.

「Then this time we will leave it be due to the generosity of Miss Mariabell」

「Thank you very much」

I'm just lazy, not generous.

Francia-sama, even though she seems older than me, does not seem to be in high school yet. I think that she is about middle school level.

I will not be overwhelmed from the verbal abuse of such an opponent. It is cute if you think of it as something like puberty and rebellious stages.

「Tuvalu, I need to return to the greetings」

「Ah, I know」

「Good.....then Miss Mariabell, excuse me」

The mantle on his shoulder fluttered as Prince Runa turned away from me.

I am glad that he gave up, but.....

「.....Ano, is Tuvalu-sama not going?」

「I have nothing to do with Runa's greetings」

Next to me, there is still Tuvalu.

If it does not matter, why were you together.....I wanted to hear, but on second thought I rather not get involved.

Prince Runa, please take this person as well.

「A person like Francia-sama may appear again」

Apparently it seems he wants to be an escort.

Thank you, but for various reasons I would rather not be involved with you.....!

「The tea, won't it become cold soon?」

「.....Thank you very much」

Chapter 26: Be an umbrella that shields against the rain

This person certainly moves at his own pace. The character setting is essentially an evil-minded boss, so maybe it is better to be my-pace. Or is he only a my-pace boss because he is still young?

[.....]

Silence hurts. But I don't talk. I am concerned that I might say something unnecessary.

Although I tried to think of an good idea of what to do in this situation, in the end, I just decided to concentrate on the black tea before my eyes.

Iya ー, it's delicious. It is very delicious. I am actually too tense and do not know the taste.

[It is unexpected]

Tuvalu who was sitting next to me in chair suddenly spoke up. Silence has its own pain, but also I do not want to be spoken to.

However, I could not ignore him, I placed the half-empty cup back into it's saucer and then turned around to face Tuvalu.

[What is?]

[I was thinking that as a daughter of the Tempest family you would be more.....noble-like]

More noble-like. It is obvious that it is not a compliment. It was worded politely, but essentially he thought that I would be similar to Francia-sama.

It is true that is the general face of nobility. Also my original character setting would be like that, so it is no exaggeration to say that it would be within my expertise.

[Francia-sama said some pretty unforgivable things. in truth, that was all she pretty much did]

In that case, why did you forgive her so easily?

This is what Tuvalu is trying to say. Even without telling everyone, there are a lot of thorns at the end of his words, I think that his words are practically a sea urchin embodied.

The image Tuvalu has on nobles is bad. Since I know the reasons, I think that it cannot be helped.

Indeed, many nobles are more or less difficult, including my parents, of course. On the front pure, clean and pure people who live in their own special world called nobility. Greas-sensei's parents are a good example.

Because they stand at the top, they are a type of human who cannot see the same things as other people. Even if they are good at using people, they are not good at caring for people.

Though Mariabell is an overstatement, even as a noble, there are not many people with the type of low character she has.

In actually, most people hide it well, and they have a good distinction on what they should and should not do. Mariabell did not have that though.

So Tuvalu was surprised by my reaction to the branch family as someone from the duke family

It seems, usually nobles after being verbally abused like that would not stay silent.

If it is true, usually she should not be sympathetic towards someone who insulted her. She would usually beat them to just beyond death. Even to the heroine who did nothing bad, she would torment and bully her unconditionally.

But the current me is not a villainess daughter, I am just simply Mariabell.

「I do not see the meaning in showing off my social position」

「……Ho~u」

So far Tuvalu had been looking at me with a soft smile, but after hearing my response his expression changed.

His mouth is still smiling but his eyes are not. It is an impression that comes from my memory, but that doesn't change it's creepiness.

After saying that, I thought this is bad. It's already too late, but there is no point in regretting it now.

「As a noble, and someone from the duke's bloodline I think there are certain responsibilities. I must not forget the feeling of respect for the ancestors whose achievements brought about this position either」

I am part of the nobility right now, not because of myself, but because of the achievements of my ancestors and the successors who have protected the status so far.

One must not get lost in their own delusions.

But one must not also act as if it has nothing to do with them.

「One must not forget the responsibility and pride of living as a noble. But also, one must not use their social position as a shield and reason to look down on others」

As a person who stands at the top, do not forget about the ones below you. Do not forget that your position is higher than people. As a person standing there, do not forget the responsibilities.

Below the nobility are the commoners. Commoners are meant to be controlled. As a subordinate though, nobility should also be standing on.

But that does not mean they are disposable and should be made light of, that's not what they are meant for.

Nobles employ commoners. And when there is something, protect them as part of their responsibility.

Using their power as a shield to protect them, and acting as an umbrella to shield them from the rain.

As a noble, that should be the case.

「At that time, Francia-sama said that my eyes are unpleasant. That is her personal impression, a difference in values. It should not be used to judge nobles as a whole」

That is not an abuse, just merely a difference in values. It is not something to break over. Just because the social status are different, doesn't mean there is any need to respond violently.

……Though actually. My true intention is 「Do not touch that topic anymore」

Tuvalu is a childhood friend of Prince Runa, and there was a feeling that even Prince Runa himself felt that what Francia-sama did could not be helped, so it would be troublesome to think poorly of this person. So let's stop here.

「He~e……」

「.....」

You were the one who started it, I just gave my opinion.

However, for an instant now for some reason.....I felt a chill.

I stiffened at the unpleasant feeling that ran through my spine, but then that feeling suddenly disappeared.

Tuvalu's expression is the same as when we met, the feelings are not transmitted but he is laughing. Just now, was it only my imagination.....?

「As expected, Mariabell-sama is very talented. Your way of thinking is far beyond your age」

「Ah.....no, it is just something I learned from the adults」

「But, is that not evidence that you are learning properly?」

「T-thank you very much」

Did you misunderstand.....? I do not know, but I do not feel like talking back again.

Practically digging my own grave.

Although I was only nine years old, I said some difficult things and carelessly forgotten my age.

After that I tried not talking as much as possible, while answering only what was asked until the party ended.

Although I was just sitting, I was really tired.....I can hardly remember the contents of the conversation.

Chapter 27: After the fear I am overjoyed

A few months after the mentally exhausting birthday party of Prince Runa.

I was worried about the involvement with Tuvalu and Prince Runa, but the situation has not changed in particular. Just that when a bouquet of roses were sent to me under Tuvalu's name, I felt shuddered, apparently it seems to be for the case of Francia-sama.

It was strange that it was not from Prince Runa, but it would actually be even more troublesome it was from him. When I think about it, perhaps it is better that it was from Tuvalu of the Marquis family.

Regardless of the giver, the roses are beautiful, and I left them to Keito's father who placed them inside a beautiful vase.

Let's place it in my room.....but I then thought of the other party and was scared, so I decided to place it in the Rose Garden which I frequented a lot.

「.....That's a large amount」

「Oji-san counted ninety in total」

「Aren't there usually a hundred?」

I thought about it, but roses have a meaning depending on the number sent, a hundred would be a problem. I do not know if Tuvalu knows it.....but it would seem to me that he does.

A neutral and beautiful face, it seems that roses and flowers would match.

「But even so it is good, aren't you overjoyed to receive such a thing?」

「.....Do not remind me」

Keito's words made me recall a fearful experience that I did not want to remember. Once remembered it will not disappear from the head.

「Okay Keito, say something funny」

「How unreasonable」

「If Keito had not reminded me」

「I did not know」

I heard an exasperated sigh as if he was tired.

I did not actually expect Keito to say anything funny.....but at least say something comforting. I am sad that my childhood friend is so cold.

「.....Haa」

As I lowered my shoulders dejectedly, I heard a second sigh. Before I could respond to it, I felt a sensation on my head as my hair was ruffled.

「.....!?!」

「Good work, you did your best」

*washawashawasha (EDN: Japanese sfx for essentially ruffling one's head)

The hair was stroked as if he were stroking a dog, and my hair was ruffled vigorously.
The tone is blunt, the behavior is sudden and too rough, it is a failing mark for how to cheer up a girl.
Though it is high score for a reliable childhood friend. Even more because he does not usually cheer me up at all.

「……Keito, you've grown up」

「Shut up」

「Ouch」

Just when I was thinking that it was deeply impressive and nodded, I was struck on my head. I am against violence.

「Alright, you will do it today!」

It's rare that the volume of Keito's voice is louder than usual, but I saw it.
Through the gap of Keito's hair his ears were red.

「Ufufu」

「……What?」

「Nothing at all, Okay! I will show you a success today!」

He would get angry if I pursue it so I changed the topic.

I took a deep breath and held the crystal ball I brought with both hands. I feel I will be able to do it today! There is no ground though!

As usual, when I put power on both hands quickly, the crystal ball starts to glow.

The light which flowed from the center gradually became larger and in my hand the crystal ball began shaking little by little.

Oh, is this……perhaps I can do it?

「……!」

This is a much bigger response than ever.

My fingers had turn white from all the power I put in my hand, I thought.

Come, I……! am already nine years old, and I want to learn how to use magical techniques already!

To do well in school, after learning practical skills to prepare for middle school.

To do that, this is essential.

「——!?」

「Maria……」

Suddenly the crystal ball grew hot.

I suddenly let go of the crystal ball without thinking.

The crystal ball drop to the floor with a loud sound, but does not break and even trembles with light.

Keito came over to me worriedly, but I could not take my eyes off the scene.

This sight resembles that time.

That one day where Greas-sensei's attribute was discovered.

「Keito watch ou-.....」

「.....!」

Watch out, I intended to say so.

I couldn't finish it, but I think it was transmitted properly. The expression of Keito changed to my voice, but...

the action taken by Keito was the opposite of what I intended.

I wanted you to stay away from the danger, but Keito pulled me into his arms and I was turned away from the light.

Like that time with Greas-sensei.

「Keito.....!?!」

「Be quiet」

Keito pushes my face against his chest. The blue of Keito's clothes filled my sight.

But I understood. The feeling of the magical power increasing, the light is getting stronger.

Just like that time.

The difference is that my five senses are functioning normally, unlike that time when I lost consciousness.

So feel it, the size of the bulging energy.

Like a balloon, it bursts when it reaches its limit.

「——」

It's no use, it's the limit.

I felt it so intuitively, that I buried my face into Keito while he pressed against me.

Two people hugging each other tightly, waiting for the shock.....though.

「.....Hmm?」

Nothing happened.

The bulging magical power keeps decreasing while maintaining the concentration, and it seems to be nowhere near the offensive power like a moment ago.

Keito also noticed, gradually loosening his grip, in the end he took his hands off my back and head.

「Maria, a little while ago.....」

「U-Un.....」

What just happened, we looked at each other with the same question on our face. For a while we were both still, but even if we stay here, we will not solve it.

Holding hands, we slowly stood up.

Walking lightly without making any sounds like a shinobi, we approached the crystal ball which caused the trouble.

But there was not a crystal ball.

「Th-This.....!」

「.....Aah」

The place where the crystal ball fell, a dark blue color stick with a piece of the crystal ball.
In other words, a magic wand.

「I did it.....I did it! This is a success, right!?!」

「Un, congratulations, Maria」

「Thank you, Keito!」

In a moment all the hardship of about a year finally came into fruit.
I can start practicing with this!

Chapter 28: I did not expect any turbulence

The practical lesson that I finally started was a lot of fun.

Originally to begin with normal studies is already dull, but it is fun to learn things you do not know. It makes me realize that in a real fantasy world subjects other than magic are just unnecessary.

I begin with making flowers bloom from the tip of the wand, to releasing light, moving light objects, the feeling is more closer of thinking of ways of using the wand rather than just simply casting a spell on something, it was the first time I did anything by myself and it was fun.

When I was in Mariabell, I could only watch, besides Mariabell seemed to have not been very interested in magic, and her amount of knowledge was small.

I am still not off the beginner's mark so it cannot be helped but it is at least fun for me, but what was Mariabell doing?Ah, she was preoccupied with harassing the heroine. Go study.

Magic is very interesting, so far my sole relationship with the capture targets is only Greas-sensei. I have not met with Tuvalu or Prince Runa since that day.

I regained my peaceful days. The fear experience was like a lie, I have completely forgotten it.

They say that disaster comes when you forget it.

× × × ×

It was on lunch one day.

「.....Father, could you please repeat what you said?」

「Mariabell, I cannot believe it this is already the fourth time」

「Once again thank you」

Four times? What is that, this is the sixth time in my life, I will ask however many times until I am satisfied.

Because, it is impossible. Why such a rapid development? Where was the flag? If not then stop joking around.

「This is the last time.....Mariabell, you seemed to have been nominated as a fiancée for Prince Runa」

「.....」

Wait, what, why, and how does such a thing happen? I did not even talk to Prince Runa since that time. More than anything, there was never such a development in the game.

Originally we recognize each other properly since I started going to the same school.....no certainly there have been many flows outside the game, like the encounter with Greas-sensei. But Greas-sensei eventually went to school properly.....!

「But why so suddenly.....we have not started looking for a fiancée for Maria-chan yet? Even so to go out of their way to nominate her for the prince」

「Ah, I am also surprised. It is usually suppose to be someone close to the royal family even though consultation is not needed」

It seemed that both my father and mother were surprised at the sudden circumstances. The usual sweet mother aside, even the usually calm father cannot grasp the intention today and seems to be puzzled. Me? I am already in a state where the thought has frozen over in a single lap.

It is still in the candidate stage, it seems that there are several other besides Mariabell.....but it is said that Mariabell is to be brought at least once」

What will you do? Father asks with a gaze.

Whatever I am told, is there even a right to veto? The other party is not another noble it's the royal family, furthermore I was even nominated.

Though the reason this time is entirely different from the letter of invitation to me for the birthday party.

「.....It is better to just go, isn't it?」

I do not want to go, but I also think that this is the fate of aristocracy.

What to do I am too calm and normal right now. It is probably the pattern of returning to sanity after fainting in agony.

I grasp my skirt and look down. I hate it, but the feeling is to give up because there is no choice. Even if I despise it, there is no choice but to go.....my stomach was in knots.

「You do not have to push yourself if you do not want to go」

「Eh.....」

「There are other candidates, even if they do not have Mariabell, it will not hurt」

That being said, father laughed gently.

Socially, I can understand that it is not a good idea to refuse. If it was another noble it would be different but the other party is royalty, it is also an important matter regarding the Prince's engagement. I do not think I can refuse. The stance is different if both sides can do anything, but if royalty asks you to do so, the nobles who are the "subordinate" cannot refuse so.

Especially the Tempest house whose relation with the royal family runs as deep as their history, it cannot be turned down so easily.

「.....I will go」

「If you do not like it, you can refuse it?」

「No, I will go. I will go and talk to them to have me removed from the list of candidates」

Un, that's good. The flag of refusing a fiancée candidate will be even more terrifying if I wait until after entering school.

If that is the case it would be better to go and refuse it early.

It's alright this is not desperation, just positive thinking. Hmm, was that Japanese?

「.....I understand, I will inform you of the date as soon as it's fixed. But if you really hate it you can still say it before then alright?」

「Yes」

When is it.....I would like to ask if I can do it before my energy fades away.
Ah, the knots in my stomach are increasing even further.....

Chapter 29: Yandere Schemer

In the end the day arrived a week after the shocking notice.

Both my father and mother came with me, but eventually they were stopped halfway and now I am walking alone with a guide down a long corridor.

I had also thought so at the birthday party, but now that I was walking through the corridor like this I was keenly aware of this castle's splendor. Although I am not dishearten by the vast difference between the royal castle and my house, it certainly does make one restless.

When trying to refrain from any unbecoming behavior, I arrived in front of one room.

The distance from other rooms is too much so I cannot imagine what is inside this room. Thought it is certainly terribly wide.

「I have brought Mariabell Tempest-sama」

「Enter」

After obtaining permission from the person inside, the guide said 「Please go ahead」 before leaving. No I would not like to go ahead.

Eh, just me alone? With the prince as the opponent? I was most certainly not told about this.

I absolutely hate this and I am very tense but.....I cannot just keep standing here like this. Making up my mind, I open the door in front of me.

「It has been a while, Prince Runa」

As soon as I entered the room and confirmed it was the prince I held the hem of my skirt and bowed.

First strike initiative!Though something felt a bit different.

It's been a while since our encounter. But it's not our first meeting.

When I raise my head, the prince himself was seated in the middle of the large reception room.

A ten year old ikemen with a beautiful perfection not doing anything but just sitting on the sofa and staring at me.

Please say something, the silence is scary.

「.....Sit down」

「Excuse me」

A silent order. As expected of a prince, definitely dignified. But I cannot afford to get irritated from the tension.

Following the prince's words, I sat down in front of him. The feeling of tension is completely different than when with Keito, though that is needless to say.

Aah my stomach hurts.....because I didn't have an appetite I have not eaten breakfast yet.

「Since the birthday party」

「That is correct」

「.....」

[.....]

Conversation, not continued.....!

But I cannot think of anything to talk about. Because it's only been the second time, there is not really any good conversation topic from our first meeting.

Or actually, now that I am near him he really does have a beautiful face.

Sparkling silver hair with sapphire blue eyes, the face itself gives off a gentle and soft impression. Even as a person with the right to succeed the throne of a country, for a shoujo manga or otome game the appearance is still a masterpiece, he is essentially the classic example of a prince.

I cannot guarantee the personality though. I don't know about the player controlling the heroine but for me who is confronted with the ultimate choice of ruin or death, I see it as nothing more than appearance and family social standing.

Even if he is attractive for the majority, he is just a terror subject for me.

[I was surprised by the sudden situation]

[That is right, there was no fla-.....previous sign at all]

That was a close one, I almost said flag.

[Ah, I was not informed of anything at the time of my birthday party too, I dare say the talk practically emerged by itself]

Eh, is that so? I was wondering if the talk had long been in place.....and whether our meeting at the party ended up further advancing the talks.

But from the reaction of the prince, apparently the prediction seems to be off.

[Ano.....then why? Nothing particular changed or happened after that party.....]

We met. Yes, there were various troublesome things. But I think that should not result in me becoming a fiancée candidate for the prince.

I have not heard anything about Francia-sama being punished, my father and mother did not ask anything either. I cannot deny the possibility of hidden factors.....but it could not have been confirmed without acknowledgment from my party.

In other words, that one incident was not conveyed to the king. But why would the King go out of his way to nominate me, there is no reason for the prince himself to choose me.

Then why, it is such a troublesome thing.

[Apparently Tuvalu.....who was with me at the party, he seemed to have said some things to my father]

It was him!!!!

Are you kidding me that yandere boy, he must have a grudge against me!

「She is such a wonderful lady, he said. Originally because Miss Mariabell is already very talented and after that was said you were made a candidate, apparently that's what happened」

「Is that so」

I am not happy, even if I was praised, in the first place I wasn't even happy to begin with.

I am absolutely 100% sure it was done with an ulterior motive! That last cold smile he gave only makes it all the more convincing!

「Also originally my fiancée is suppose to be someone we can strengthen our ties and social position through marriage. Although the Tempest family is certainly a perfect choice, it does not matter even if we do not get married due to our existing past history」

Even though I had on a very light smile my inner heart was filled with abusive phrases against Tuvalu, my thoughts stopped momentarily from Prince Runa's remark.

What.....I have a feeling that I heard something that is convenient for me.

「Certainly you are a candidate.....though do not expect too much」

「Etto....so in other words」

「It can be said it is unlikely that you will become an official fiancée」

To Prince Runa's straight-forward answer, I held my breath. Otherwise I might accidentally cry out in response.

Hooray —! Much appreciated!!

And probably get into a gut pose as well.

「I-Is.....that so, understood」

Ah, my voice is trembling. Without even meaning to my mouth automatically breaks into a smile. I try to clench my hands and tighten my mind but it does not go well.

Because, even though I was going to refuse I was prepared that it might be difficult, instead a refusal came from the other side!

While the likability for Tuvalu has dropped, the impression of Prince Runa is on the rise. I will refrain from the engagement with every effort.

「It cannot be helped, our fates just were not meant to cross」

「.....Sorry」

「Please do not apologize. Prince Runa has done nothing wrong, correct?」

Rather thank you.

I would like to thank you with a dogeza, but I cannot do that.

Chapter 30: I want to ban outbursts of anger

After that, with the conversation over I left the room. Apparently, there seems to be other candidates coming besides me today. Because of the situation I did not realize it before, but it was basically a slotted amount of time with the prince, so like a job interview? No not a job interview but a fiancée interview?

Anyways, my purpose was achieved. Thanks to Prince Runa, not me.

Let's share this joy with Keito when I return home. It might be good idea to make sweets with mother. But I wonder if I should let out my joy in my room first. Imagining what to do from now, I was in a cheerful mood.

Until now.

「Mariabell-sama, it's been a long time」

It is none other than because of this yandere schemer.

「Tuvalu-sama.....why are you here?」

「I came because of my father. Today is the day Runa's fiancée candidates come」

In other words, he came to observe Prince Runa's fiancée candidates. He is such a loving person, wouldn't it be nice if he ran away with Prince Runa?

「Did Mariabell-sama also come to see Runa too?」

「.....Ee, just to give my greetings as a fiancée candidate」

Even though he knows he is pretending he doesn't, he really does have a twisted personality. I heard that I ended up in this troublesome matter because you decided to mention me for nomination. Though Prince Runa ended up cleaning up your mess!

「By the way, I heard that you recommended me to the king」

「Ee, As Mariebell-sama seemed to be the perfect example of a noble, I thought it would be an appropriate match for the prince」

With a calm tone, there is no thorn in the contents either. But it would end up exploding in my hands if I received it.

I should thrust him a mirror.

A mouth twisted into a distorted smile, at first glance the eyes look soft and clear but look a little deeper and it is murky and muddy.

Apparently I seem to be deeply disliked by this guy but I cannot investigate the reason. I do not know about the past five rounds, but this time I have not done anything bad?

「You are overestimating me, I am only a girl without any power」

「Ee.....you are just merely a sheltered girl」

「Eh.....wai-, that hurts.....」

I was about to return his provoking as nonchalantly as possible, or I was supposed to. He was certainly smiling but the next moment that expression disappeared completely from his face. I was surprised by the sudden coldness and lost my voice, and before I knew it I was grabbed by the wrist and forcefully driven into the wall.

Kabe-don.....somehow my chest is not throbbing. Both casts are about ten years old, so the atmosphere is awkward. (Ed: *Kabedon in simplest terms, “kabe” (壁) means “wall,” and “don” (ドン) is a loud noise. So, **kabe-don** is loosely, “hitting a wall.”*)

I had closed my eyes from the shock but when I opened them Tuvalu’s eyes matched mine.

「What you said before on what nobility should be like and how nobles use commoners without looking down on them, about how that’s the right way of aristocracy」

The expression of Tuvalu is distorted. Grudge, resentment, jealousy, hatred, a sneering smile mixed with feelings.

「But that’s only just a beautiful dream, it is just a shallow ideal of a human who knows nothing, who only ever sees the beautiful side. A suitable thing to say for a clueless stubborn brat brought up in a greenhouse.....nothing more than a mere fantasy」

I do not understand the meaning of his words. I do not know what he want me to do, what Tuvalu wants to do.

One thing is definite though.

「I want to force reality upon you, Mariabell-sama」

Apparently it seems that this guy wants me to get hurt.

I understood the cause behind Tuvalu’s words. It seems that the contents I talked about at the birthday party incurred his wrath. (Ed: *This use to be “It seems that the contents I talked about at the birthday party **triggered him**” just thought I should mention that*)

Because I was in a position protected as the daughter of the duke, he did not like that I talked about an ideal as if I knew everything.

It’s not like I don’t understand his feelings. If a human who does not know anything starts talking as if they did to my face, it would make me angry too. If one were to touch upon an ideal without any experience, it is natural to be frowned upon rather than leave an impression. Furthermore I am still only nine years old, so it is unlikely that I have seen and experience reality.

So he tried to force reality upon me.

To me who displayed such beautiful logic, he tried to involve me in the matters of the prince’s fiancée candidates. Tried to pit what I dreamed nobles should be like to what nobles are actually like. What Tuvalu refers to as “nobility” against actual “nobility”.

Because I know Tuvalu’s past, I can understand that feeling. I can understand but I cannot convince him.

So essentially he is just venting his anger out on me.

「Stop joking around」

Chapter 31: If you want to act sick do it alone please

The aim is the toe, the little toe at the farthest is the best.

「O-.....!？」

After a couple of exercises in the brain, I stepped on Tuvalu's toes with no hesitation.

It was light but since it was a heel it was good enough. Although a pin heel would've been more ideal, a nine year old cannot wear it. Instead of applying the whole weight I think just a sharp pain is about right.

Tuvalu staggered a few steps back after the impact standing on one foot with his other foot raised. It seems like I got the ideal damage so I am happy.

With the body that was cornering me having separated, I stepped forward one step front this time so that I cornered Tuvalu.

「Tuvalu」

「W-.....」

I put up my arms and dropped the honorific title to his name while Tuvalu glares back at me undaunted. Un, the horrible expression still suits you. I saw it over and over, on your route. In my heart I was always scared.

Mariabell seems to have not noticed though, so maybe Mariabell is duller than the heroine in a sense. Such dullness seems to have disappeared or was I becoming stronger? Perhaps the latter, now I am not scared at all.

Because I am angry.

I just want to live peacefully as much as possible, it's not like I particularly have a philanthropic spirit like a saint or anything.

「I know what kind of feelings you have towards nobles」

「Ha? Wha——」

「Listen to the end and do not interrupt」

Didn't you do something like this just a while ago? Next is my turn, do not interrupt.

「You dislike nobles and the reasons for it I understand to some extent.....however, I honestly do not care nor am I interested」

I think I feel sorry; Marquis Miranda's treatment is indeed the lowest and I believe that divine retribution will fall upon that unorthodox Marquis one day.

But is that related to me? No, right?

In that case then why should I have to accept your outburst of anger. Compassion and tolerance are not equal; don't mess with me.

「What do you know.....!」

「Right back at you idiot」

Ah, my true thoughts.....well it's fine.

「What do you know of me, I wonder?」

The daughter of the duke, idealist dreaming of nobility.

Tuvalu's mind has those thoughts about me. Not only Tuvalu, I think father and mother's thoughts are not that different either.

The Duke's daughter, Mariabell Tempest.

From my perspective there are many places that are not normal but there are also many places that are normal.

A princess sleeping in happiness while being protected by the cocoon called the duke.

That is my container, shell, and from one side it is also a fact.

「You do not know anything, that's why my words seem like mere idealistic remarks indulged in my dreams that do not see the reality」

I thought about all those times I restarted over.

I thought about all those lives I had to experience without happiness repeatedly.

Even though I did not do anything, I also could not do anything, I thought about all those times I was abused by "you guys".

「To see everything from one side and act as if you know everything, to be bent on running recklessly until finally venting out your anger」

The fear of the moment when I woke up for the first time.

The fear of noticing that there is no end.

The fear of knowing that there is no happiness on the other side.

「It is somewhat unsightly to a certain extent」

It is the respected truth that built me up.

「How you will accept my words is up to you, If you want to think that it's just mere hypocrisy, that's alright」

My thoughts that were cultivated through the many cycles.

If you do not receive it, that is still fine.

「It is easy to turn a blind eye towards matters. If you wish you can say anything you want regarding me, but.....please do that without me alright?」

Whatever Tuvalu will be, I am not interested in the least. Whether he clings to or is dumped by the heroine, it does not concern me.

So please do not try and involve me.

After dropping that line, I abandoned Tuvalu on the spot and left.

I joined my father and my mother and came home as if nothing had happened. I did not report the conversation with Prince Runa.

The interaction with Tuvalu.....there is no reason to report it.

Chapter 32: I am begging you therefore rise from regret

Humans, when they disregard their surroundings certain matters began to disappear. It is common that once you concentrate on one matter, you can start to neglect others. It is not particularly unusual, it is a natural phenomenon.

And because of that it is inevitable that once you return to reality you also begin to regret; it is essentially a set.

「……I want to cry」

「You can cry but I will not comfort you」

「At least lie and say you will comfort me!」

「From a while ago until now no matter what I say you continued to be depressed, there is nothing more I can say」

As soon as I finished meeting with the prince and came back, I directly ran into my temple of sanctuary. In other words, Keito's house in our premises.

Usually it would be the rose garden, but I do not know when father or mother will come. It was just recently that mother came there to deliver terrible news.

So it is has become customary to go to Keito's house when I do not want people to disturb me.

The contents of the story is of course about the violence inflicted upon me.

「Although if Keito was around you could've stopped him……」

「I cannot go, I am only a servant's child after all」

That's true. Even my parents could not go let alone a servant. As for the child……Un, I know that it's impossible. In the first place it's already over, so no matter how much I complain time will not turn back.

「Although I said it many times already, I do not think that you did anything particular terrible. Also wasn't it the other side that started venting their anger towards Maria?」

「Yes, but……more or less there is still this and that between nobles」

「Even so, it was the other side that raised their hand first……or actually, a man raising his hand towards a female is no good」

「……Though Keito sometimes hits me」

He is saying cool things but is not really convincing.

「Maria has never saw me as a man, so it's all good」

「What is with that reasoning!」

That's right, but……even though he also has never thought of me as a girl, it's unreasonable.

But even though I say that in front of me there is a cup of tea and sweets that Keito prepared for me, because he offers proper hospitality and keeps me company while also listening to my various complaints of sorts, he is actually rather kind.

「Anyhow I believe Maria had no faults this time, so do not worry about it anymore」

「U —……」

I am very glad that you say that……it is not easy to convince myself whether I dug my own grave or not.

Even though it was merely just resisting his outburst of anger, it was still bothersome until Keito reassured me.

But that is not what I am particular worried about.

「Why did I say such a thing……」

At that time, I said unintentionally.

『I know what kind of feelings you have towards nobles』

This is bad, it is actually very bad isn't it!?

At that time my anger peaked and I flew off the handle, but that was too dangerous now that I think about it.

Because that remark makes it seem as if I know the secret of Tuvalu's birth and early life!

The secret of Tuvalu is something Marquis Miranda hid with all his power. I do not even know his parents, and if I recall from his route the King also doesn't know about this.

A secret the top of the country doesn't even know, yet somehow a nine-year old girl knows would definitely be a talk.

「Keito, if it comes to please pick up my bones」

「Run away before you get reduce to bones」

I wish I could get away but……it feels like it will be impossible with that yandere schemer. If civilization evolves, it seems likely to be monitored illegally using a GPS.

If it was that girl she might be able to erase all contact with that man, it would be like putting on a skirt for her.

That Yandere-san.

Although there are various circumstances, there is no doubt. In truth he is just an incredibly messed up person.

During Mariabell's bullying, in the beginning I was glad to rely on her and was silent.

The more I remember, the more he seems like a terrible yandere. What to do my worries are doubling.

「Alright, finish!」

「……!?!」

While my mind was enveloped in unease I suddenly heard a *Pan, and with the loud noise I returned to myself while Keito was holding his hands in front of him.

It seems that the sound of his hands clapping recalled me from my thoughts.

「Time to switch, I said it before, Maria is haphazard but in a good way」

「……I only remember being called an idiot」

「That problem lies with the memory of Maria」

「Are you trying to praise me or make fun of me which one is it?」

Such a rude fellow! But I suppose this is the consideration of Keito. This usual interaction makes me feel calm.

Let's see the situation for the time being.

If something does happen.....at that time let's just escape from the life-threatening challenge.

「Alright, how about a cup of tea?」

「……I want」

For now let's just relax and drink Keito's tea.

Chapter 33: My guardian deity is definitely a god of pestilence

After that, about one month has passed since that violent assault.

For the time being there hasn't been any problems.....or rather I should say, for the time being Tuvalu hasn't contacted me yet. In that regards I sighed a deep breath of relief. Though for now, I cannot completely rest assure yet.

I will erase Tuvalu from my mind for the time being because even if I worry about it I can't do anything in regards to it. Recalling the bad memory just makes it seem like his shadow might emerge out of nowhere.

Anyways let's just concentrate on the problem in front of me.

「I am Mariabell Tempest nice to meet you」

「.....I am Niel」

Even though the weak reply came from a capture target it doesn't bring any fear. Rather the voice was small enough to make one worry whether this person was alright or not, his self introduction proved that he is not good with self-assertion.

Fluffy moss green hair, thick glasses, the fingertips that can be seen from the long-hem clothing are white and thin. My complexion is generally white too, but that's not what I meant for person standing in front of me.....somehow, it's a sickly kind of white. It can be rephrased as pale.

The voice also emphasizes his weak appearance, and suspicious behavior. From then to now he has been repeatedly avoiding my field of vision.

No, I don't mean to say that he is being rude. Rather do I have to stay here? Can I go home?

You might have realized when he gave his name, but let me start from the beginning.

I am with one of the capture targets, Niel Juliano, the youngest child of the Count.

Moreover, in the reception room of his house.

The beginning of all this started three days ago.

× × × ×

On that day, I was in the rose garden waiting for Keito after finishing with Linda-sensei's lesson as usual.

As usual I was just idly thinking that he should be returning home soon but at that moment.

「Maria-chan, may I talk to you for a bit?」

「Mother?」

To be honest, at this point I already had a bad feeling.

When my mother comes looking for me in the rose garden unpleasant things always happen. But of course it's not my mother's fault.

「What's wrong?」

「Yes, actually a guest has come for Maria-chan」

「For me.....?」

At that moment I started sweating feeling this was very bad. A cold sweat ran through my back and forehead, I remembered my body temperature dropping in an instant.

Someone came to my house and visited, and furthermore it was for me and not my father or mother. There is only one such person who would do that.

「It seems they would like to talk with Maria-chan, since they are currently waiting in the reception room do you mind coming?」

「Yes, I understand」

Although I appeared to be calm, on the inside I was actually secretly developing an escape plan. I was also letting loose my anger about Keito not returning home.

Even though I asked you to pick up my bones.....! Although you didn't actually agree to it! While gathering up complaints inside my mind, I slowly headed towards the reception room.

「Sorry I made you wait」

「Pardon.....me?」

I entered the room and gave a bow. It is courtesy and also a kind of custom. That's why I often go through it before I check who was in the room.

When raising your head, it's not entirely unlikely that someone different from the person you imagined would be in front of you.

But this time I had confidence that I was not wrong.

Because the only person that came to mind when I was told someone came to visit me would be a certain yandere.

「Maria-chan, these are the sons of Count Julianio」

「I am Rave Julianio」

「Likewise, I am Iria」

But there was not the light blue hair color that I imagined, but instead two men with moss green hair. E —tto.....who are you two?

No, they've already introduced themselves and I remember the name of these two as well as the capture target's.....but why were these people visiting me?

I should be glad that it's not the yandere, but I am at a loss as to whether I should be saddened that a capture target was still concerned.

「Apologies, for the sudden visit」

「I intended to make an appointment.....but I wanted to keep this a secret from my father」

「No, I don't mind, just that because Kirua-sama is at work, is it fine to talk to me instead?」

「Yes, of course」

The talk was progressing very fast but I still haven't caught up yet.

You shouldn't have accepted it so easily. That's because in Niel's route wasn't I convicted of false charges by these two people?

That I had defamed and caused injury towards the heroine, that I had stolen my parents' assets and made money by illegal means.

.....The first half is actually correct so it's hard to deny.

「Well then, let's immediately move on to the main subject.....」

I sat in front of them alongside mother as she encouraged them on.

If possible I would like to retract that statement and say I am busy then run away, but that is impossible.

I feel like I have been giving up more easily recently.

「To tell the truth, Mariabell-sama I'd like you to come to my house」

Eh, no way.

I am sorry for declining before even hearing your reason but I know I will still hate it. Because it's the house of the capture target an enemy territory! Going there, what kind of suicide action would that be?

「Eh, well.....what does that mean.....?」

Look, even my mother is troubled!

Though it's most likely for an entirely different reason from mine. Taking me home, if one took it the wrong way that might seem like a proposal.

Doing that kind of thing even though I am only 10 years old, if it's a lolicon after declining please return home graciously. Although both of them are actually not old enough to be considered lolicons.

「We have a younger brother who is rather distant towards us, so I wanted Mariabell-sama to call out Niel as.....well, he won't ever come out of his room」

「Originally he doesn't like going out much to begin with because of his personality and it just kept getting worse as he became older, in the end he even stayed inside and refused to go to the Birth Anniversary Party of Prince Runa」

That is pretty severe. The invitation letter also had my name on it, so the invitation letter that came to the Juliano household most likely also had the name of Niel.

For the nobles the party is an important social gathering, and for children it is an important place to study various manners.

Even ignoring royal invitations, it's not a good idea to abandon learning opportunities.

「I understand what we are asking for, but because it concerns private family matters I would like to avoid a detailed explanation.....」

「It's alright you don't have to say it if you don't want to」

「.....I'm sorry」

Mother seemed to have noticed that Rave-san was struggling for the right words.

Although I already knew the general picture, I didn't say anything. I learned, don't say anything unnecessary.

「That's why I want to get Niel outside somehow, at the very least for social occasions」

Rave-san seemed seriously down. Iria-san also held his hands and furrowed his brow. Both of them felt Niel was very important, and were worried or that's what I thought. But.....that's why I didn't understand.

「Is that so.....I understand the issue, but in that case wouldn't it be better to find a proper adult? Why Mariabell.....」

Exactly that. As mother says, Niel's case seemed quite serious, so I also thought that finding a proper adult would be better.

It may be difficult because there is also the issue with Count Julianos.....but even if you call me I won't be able to solve it.

Or rather, this is my first time meeting both of them. I don't recall ever meeting them before in the past, for these two people I should just be a regular young girl.

Is it really alright to leave their important little brother with such a person?

「We can't call any adults, because it will be refused if my father finds out.....」

Ah, so you did it once. I felt an already-experienced kind of tone.

「If it's children we can invite them into our house, furthermore if it's Mariabell-sama.....」

If it's me? No, I don't have any certification on counseling.

「The Tigerson household's daugh——」

「I will do it, please let me do it!!」

I raised my hands firmly with a loud voice to drown out Rave-san's words.

My mother, and both Rave-san and Iria-san were startled to my sudden outburst.

Rave-san.....what were you trying to say just now?

Did you just say Tigerson?

What, have you come to remind me of that dreaded memory?

Thus, my visit to the Julianos household was decided.

It goes without saying that I went to vent out my anger on Keito after those two returned.

Chapter 34: Impossible Difficulty

Even though I said I would come to the Juliano house to meet Niel.....but to be honest I don't know what to do.

At that time I didn't want mother to hear any unnecessary things so I automatically accepted, and most likely Rave-san and Iria-san are just overestimating me.

I have no idea how to improve his withdrawal state.

「E ーtto.....about me」

「I heard from Rave-oniisama」

「Is that so.....」

The conversation doesn't continue. To begin with I'm not really good with people.....or rather it's because of the people I get entangled up with. Such as Francia-sama or a certain yandere.

Why I wonder.....is it because of my face? It's true that facial expressions are getting tighter year after year, but since I am only 10 years old it should still be acceptable.

「I'm sorry.....」

「Hm? 」

I'm sorry, I forgot you even existed for a while. He doesn't really have much presence.....or I guess it's actually because I was thinking about something else.

Hmm? I wonder why he apologized just now.

「B-Because of me.....you had to go..out of your way..to come here」

「Please don't mind it, because I accepted the request myself」

His voice kept on changing around due to fear, or is it just how he regularly is? If possible the latter would be better otherwise that would be troubling in it's own right.

Hmm.....should I change his way of speaking first?

I was asked by Rave-san to handle two issues.

One is improve his withdrawal state so he can participate in the higher society.

The other is to get him accustomed to conversing with others.

I thought that if I somehow managed to do the second one the first one would just naturally follow, or that's what I thought but.....first of all the second one was already extremely difficult.

「That's right.....first of all, Niel-sama do you not like going outside?」

「Eh.....?ah, um.....t-that sort of thing」

「Please tell me your honest feelings」

「T-To be honest I don't dislike it.....but.....I feel the most comfortable.....inside my room」

If he didn't like going outside I was thinking of searching for a way to allow him to overcome it inconspicuously, but there is still room for improvement if that wasn't so.

His voice is small, he kept changing the way he talks but it can't be helped so I will just have to get use to it, and he kept moving his head around while his eyes kept jumping around from place to place. Along with his suspicious behavior and his face being hidden underneath his hair and glasses, he could easily be mistaken for a suspicious person.

「Niel-sama, if you are unable to look directly into the other party's eyes you should at least look at their nose」

「Eh.....」

「From a while ago till now haven't you been trying to look me in the eyes? But since you couldn't do it for a long time you kept looking away」

I can't tell for sure because I can't see Niel's eyes, but I think there were many times when he had tried to.

He had tried to look into my eyes, endure it, but was unable to bear it and kept looking away. That's why his head kept moving around and it looked like suspicious behavior.

It's true it's better to look directly into one's eyes when speaking with them but there are just some people who aren't good at it. Because the eyes can also say as much as the mouth, it can make one feel like their mind is being read.

「If you look at the other party's nose, it will seem like you are looking at their eyes」

Well with Niel's case since his bangs and glasses covered his eyes you can't actually tell where he is looking at.

「I-Is that so.....」

「Because it looks suspicious if you move your head around too much」

「Y-Yes.....」

Even if he has a conversation in high society now it should at least appear polite for now. Only in appearance though. I can't guarantee anything more than that.

Even then.....how far should I take this?

To be honest, I know how to change him. Because I've experienced his route after all. Cut the bangs, remove the glasses, and then lavish him with praises afterwards.

I might have summarized it a bit too much but the behavior of the heroine on his route is like this. Although from the surface Niel looked really easy to handle, the heroine must have tried so hard.....or at least that's what I thought.

But is it really fine for me to do this?

Because it's the heroine's job to make Niel confident.....more importantly I should actually be a person who doesn't know anything about his family matters.

Interfering in this poorly might bring the opposite effect and may actually corner Niel more.

But I don't want to be called over again. Also I don't know how it would be taken by Count Juliano if he were to find out.

What should I do.....

Chapter 35: I wonder if I can have one friend

Eventually a good plan for that day came unexpectedly. In the next five days, it seems Count Juliano will be traveling to other countries for business matters. That man is not really respected by his sons.....though it is self-wrought.

But more important than that, I have something I need to think about.

If I were to say it there is nothing I can do.

No, there is something I can do but it's not a route I can take.

I know his family environment due to the knowledge from the past five rounds, though currently I should be a human who knows absolutely nothing about Niel.

I know how to change him, but then I must also address the problems surrounding the Juliano House. If I do it in the present state and try to change Niel he would surely doubt me and in the future his distrust for me will only grow.

That is a problem. I dislike prolonging things.

「Have Niel go outside and get him use to conversing with other people.....」

I thought of various methods but in the end practicing is the only way. Even with the knowledge sitting down and writing in my notebook doesn't bring any other method.

「U~n.....」

「What are you worrying about?」

「Eh.....Keito! What are you doing here?」

As I sat on the sofa in my room worrying I then heard a voice and before I realized Keito was behind me.

This is my room though! And when did he come in!

「Delia-sama was showing me around, I knocked, but there was no reply」

「Uu.....I didn't notice」

「I thought so, you met the youngest of Count Juliano today didn't you? I thought you might be agonizing over it」

As expected of a childhood friend, he understands me well.

「Judging from your looks is it perhaps worse than I thought?」

「Rather than bad.....it's just I don't know what to do」

It would be ideal if I don't mention Neil's family environment and could still at least teach him how to converse with people.

Such a method, if it could only be so easy.

「.....That's it」

「Hm?」

「I thought of something」

A way for Niel to learn how to converse with people or at the very least get him accustomed to people.
Of course, I will not mention the matter regarding the Juliano House.

Yes, with this I can do it!

「Keito, will you cooperate a little?」

「I am fine with it but what are you going to do?」

「It's simple, I should just become friends with Niel」

× × × ×

Five days later, I called Niel to the Tempest house.

I thought that he would be a bit reluctant but surprisingly he simply accepted.

In the end Niel doesn't want to leave his room or go outside of his house, or to the party venue.....in other words where his family is at.

Sorry Niel, but that is not something I can solve.

It's a problem that only the heroine or his family can solve

「A-Ano.....why..me」

「Niel-sama, please become friends with me」

「Eh.....?」

Upon hearing my words, Niel was surprised and opened his eyes wide.

Yes, it's quite surprising. I am even surprised at myself for saying so.

I never thought the day would come where I would declare friendship with a capture target that I've been trying to avoid all this time.....I daresay I have become rather bold.

Perhaps it was because out of all the capture targets Niel can be said to be the least harmful. If it was Tuvalu even if heaven and earth were to be destroyed I still wouldn't say it.

「It's the fastest way to get use to talking with other people, it might be a bit sudden to ask to be friends but I thought this would also make Niel-sama feel more at ease」

Plus if I become friends with him now it might also be better off for me in the future. I thought it could be something similar as the time with Greas-sensei.

「That's why, let's go!」

「E-Ehhh!?!」

He seems unable to keep up with the current situation but I don't care. Because momentum is important with such things!

I pulled Niel's hand and headed towards the rose garden that I am usually always at.

The courtyard or something would've also been fine but.....if too many people come around Niel

might not be able to do it. Almost nobody comes to the rose garden, even if someone does come it usually is mother.

「Keito ー, you there ー? 」

「I'm here, it was Maria who said to come here and prepare first」

「That's why I asked to see if you were ready」

「Can't you just say that then?」

When I entered the rose garden, there was the usual round table set I use along with teas and sweets for three. There are usually only two chairs but since I ordered an additional chair in advance there are now three chairs.

「A-Ano I.....」

Niel was clearly confused when the number of people suddenly increased.

He looked towards Keito, then at me, then looked down. He repeated it many times, it seems he was trying to think of what to say. He probably already thought of what to say but I guess he just doesn't know how to say it.

「My name is Keito, I am Maria's childhood friend.....Niel is it? I am two years older than you」

「Ah, etto.....I am Niel Juliano, Juliano's house.....youngest..child」

「Hm, understood, you don't have to be so formal. I am a commoner so like Maria you shouldn't worry about it.

「Y-Yes.....」

It seems he calmed down a little due to Keito's lax atmosphere, it was as if a relaxing aura could be seen flowing forth from his body.

Just like I thought, calling Keito along was the right move.

With just me alone it would have been too uptight due to my social position.

Above all with Keito here it's also more relaxing for me. With just nobles here the entire time we would only be able to think about mining our manners, but with Keito here he can act as a sort of buffer to that.

Well I guess Keito's character itself can also be said to be very my-pace.

「Well then, both of you sit down otherwise the tea I went for the trouble of preparing will cool down」

Anyway, we have broken through the first barrier.....I think.

Chapter 36: Cute is justice

At the beginning of the “tea party” the atmosphere around Niel was tense, though I think gradually with each word the atmosphere around him softened as he became more accustomed.

Or rather it seems he was just surprised by the interactions between Keito and me or at least that’s the feeling I get.

「Maria, it’s going to spill」

「Hm?」

「Here, aah, don’t wipe it with those hands」

It seems that there was cream on the edge of my mouth from when I was indulging myself with cream puffs. Keito tells me to wipe my own mouth but before I could wipe the cream Keito wiped it away with his finger.

I looked at my two hands after hearing Keito’s words, they were covered in powder and white cream. Yes, thank you Keito.

「Niel would you like a refill?」

「Ah, no, I can do it myself.....」

「There is a lot so you don’t have to hold back」

「T.....thank you very much」

「Hm, you’re welcome」

..... Somehow, this is a good trend?

I am rather impressed with Keito’s my-pace attitude, at least he can now properly talk unlike before. More than anything I can properly see his eyes.....and when I look at them.

He is not moving his head around and I don’t see any suspicious behavior!

「Maria, if you space out it’ll spill out again」

「Eh? Ah, yes!」

I was to preoccupied with observing the two that I tilted the cup too much when I brought it to my mouth.....that was close too close.

「.....Ano」

「Hm?」

「The two of you, have.....you known each other..for a long time?」

Because he was mumbling I thought he had something he wanted to say, but instead it was an unexpected question. Well originally his way of speaking is confusing to begin with.

Me and Keito unintentionally gave a blank look for a moment.

「Hmm.....since I was four, so about six years」

「I guess you could say it's been long」

It's not so in terms of years but it's long considering our age. That's right, I've spent half of my life with Keito.

When I think about it I feel rather indebted to Keito. Including this time.

「Six years, is that right.....」

「Why did you ask? 」

「The two of you seem very close.....just like I thought you've known each for a long time」

He gradually lowered his head with each word. Is he.....depressed? His default personality is depressed to begin with so I am at a loss.

「Hmm.....so what about it?」

「Eh.....」

「We've been like this since we first met」

Yes, that's right. In our six years of being childhood friends it doesn't really feel like our intimacy has increased but rather our time as friends. Of course the feeling of trust is much stronger now. Or rather his attitude towards me is different now.

「Originally Keito had no respect towards me so my spirit was damaged」

He called such a hard-working kitten like me creepy, what a foul mouthed fellow. Though I was the one who revealed myself before that.

「I-Is that so.....」

「That's why you don't have to worry about it too much」

「That's my line」

But it's certainly right.

「It's true becoming friends made us more closer, but it's also true that we became more closer because we wanted to be friends」

When I look at Keito and me along with our six year history it's even hard for me to believe it. Certainly our relationship was built from the past six years but Niel is a different story.

「That's why don't mind it too much, first let's just start with what Niel wants and go with that. If you get angry or become sad or do something and apologize that is fine, if it turns out we aren't compatible and you want to leave that is also fine」

.....Why am I doing something like giving advice for making friends?

Aren't I deviating away from my original purpose?

It's true that I was planning to become friends with Niel, but somehow is it just my imagination that the reason changed.....yes, it's just my imagination.

Besides there is no other idea.

「For the time being please call me Maria」

「E.....Ehhh!？」

「Give it up Niel, once Maria decides on something she will not let up」

Let's first start with the appearance. If you change the way you call someone it will appear you are more intimate, it's a very important matter!

「E-tto.....Maria..sana.....?」

「Not quite, the sama is not necessary」

「No, no, that is.....」

「I call you Niel though right?」

「Uu.....」

He seems to be completely troubled.

Even so I will not concede.

I stared unwavering at him as if we were two people engaged in a staring contest. The one who laughs first loses, the one who breaks away first loses.

The results were decided in a few seconds.

Of course, I am the winner.

「.....Maria-chan?」

Niel's face turned bright red as he shyly called my name in a small voice.

What should I do.....it's super cute.

Originally his character classification is under the cute category. I know because I know what his really face looks like underneath the hair and glasses.

More than anything else after that Tuvalu. My depraved heart heals after seeing Niel's cuteness. On the contrary the negative points of Tuvalu are doubling but he brought that upon himself.

Now that I think about it, I am almost never involved with anyone younger than me.....all the other capture targets that I've met so far are older than me, even Keito who is next to me is also older.

The more I think about it the cuter he becomes.....and at the same time, a little desire arises.

「Niel.....would you please call me onee-chan?」

「Stop now idiot」

Chapter 37: Just When I Forget it Comes Back

The first tea party is a success.

Niel is still socially withdrawn, but at least he received some practice with talking to people.

I failed to get him to call me onee-chan.....but it will definitely come true someday.

Because Count Juiliano returned the second meeting was delayed, but thanks to Rave-san coming up with excuses our tea parties managed to continue.

After two or three more times his visits ended up becoming customary, and today was once again the day where Niel regularly visits our house.

And today, counting from the one we had two weeks ago will mark the fourteenth tea party.

「We prepared macaroons today」

「Yesterday Maria suddenly said she wanted to eat them」

「So Maria-chan..likes macaroons 」

Fufu, Niel gave a light laugh compared to before his way of speech is a lot more smoother now. He sometimes will still get stuck but there is no weird pauses now.

It has already been more than half a year since I first met Niel and we have been holding tea parties at a pace of twice a month since.

Should I rejoice in the fact that he has improved so much in half a year or should I be saddened that he has only improved to this extent after half a year?

He still stays holed up in his room but at least he now comes out to attend the tea parties. Rave-san gave his thanks to me. With such vigor too, I was actually a bit scared.

「By the way, is it true that Maria-chan will not participate in the party hosted by Marquis Milanda?」

「G-hou.....」

I thought I would spit out.....but I resisted it. The sudden Milanda remark shocked me.

It's already been a long time since I last met Tuvalu, I haven't seen him at all since then. I don't want to see him though. We almost ran into each other again at a party but I stuck close to my father and passed by him.

However, during this period an invitation arrived regarding the party Marquis Milanda was hosting.

I ended up screaming.

I seriously thought it was a curse letter.

I absolutely will not go, I couldn't say that as I was already obligated by the duty of nobles.

So I politely declined it.

But why does Niel know that!?

「I met the son of Marquis Milanda at another party.....he said it was such a shame that Maria-chan couldn't come」

Lies! It's a lie Niel! That schemer fooled Niel.

「I only decided to participate because.....I thought I would be able to go with Maria-chan」

「.....Sorry」

Niel's brows lowered and he had a regretful expression on his face so I quickly apologized, but Niel then hastily said 「Please do not mind」 and gave a laugh.

Yes, I'm really sorry. But even so no matter how much the cute Niel begged me I still will definitely not let up.

Meeting with that evil schemer is no joke.

When I think about how we had fought I don't know what he will do to me. I don't have a masochistic hobby of going to see my own fear subject.

Keito also said nothing because he already heard an earful from me regarding that subject.

「But I have never been to a party of a Marquis before.....」

Niel even skipped out on the royal family's birthday party so obviously he didn't respond to invitations from other nobles. It wasn't until recently that he finally started participating in parties and started to rehabilitate due to the small scale parties.

.....But to even participate in a large scale party like the Marquis household's. Although I am pleased with his growth, out of all people he had to choose Marquis Milanda.

It's a rather complex feeling.

「The scale may be bigger but the manners are the same, so don't be afraid and go as usual」

「Yes, thank you very much」

「But just one thing」

「.....? 」

「.....Be careful of the schemer」

You must not let your guard down, ever. Because he is even more terrifying than horror itself.

「Schemer.....sama?」

I just give an ambiguous smile to the speechless Niel.

I am not going to name anyone but still do be careful.

Then as we were discussing the date for our next tea party, Niel told me with a smile that he had become close with Tuvalu. Every time Niel praised Tuvalu my evaluation of Tuvalu dropped even further lower.

If he drags Niel into the darkness with him I will absolutely never forgive him.

Chapter 38: Countdown

It all started with Greas-sensei, then I became involved with Runa, Tuvalu, and finally Niel. Runa is still within the safe zone but the other three.....especially Tuvalu the relationship is rather uneasy.

It's different from a simple quarrel, instead there is a bad feeling of all sorts. I am not sorry about it but I do regret it.

Even so, the reason why I was somewhat saved was because the relation with them was only a temporary thing that remained within "social gatherings".

After enduring a few hours, the relation could then be avoid any number of times.

But even that will come to an end someday.

Before I realized it was already near the middle school entrance ceremony.....half a year later.

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「What should I do?」

I was crushed by the reality after seeing the calendar.

Because.....it's already been half a year? Half a year passed so quickly, from now on it would be six years of cohabitation won't it? Keito won't be there, and Niel is a year later, so it will be a triple-handicap against the fellow capture target classmates!

Because the Tempest House is far from the academy, I decided to live in the dorms. Yes, I was prepared since I had prior knowledge, I already experienced five rounds.

But before I was fine with it since it wasn't actually "Me" but now since it's my first time my heart is beating rapidly.

Of course, it's not from excitement but rather anxiety.

「.....For now, I suppose I should just get ready」

I should hurry up and prepare for the start of a new life.

Though since I am already prepared there is actually no need to hurry.

I don't need to worry about the school supplies since all of it will be sent over and everything else will also be prepared by ourselves. Including moving into the dormitory. If it was an ordinary school, I would have gone to school for measurements of uniforms.....but nobles are out of the ordinary in various ways.

「Maria-chan, the tailor has arrived」

「Ah yes! I am coming!」

Rather than coming, they came instead. Although I was surprised when I first heard that it would be custom-made, but because a tailor had come that time to make the dress too I ended up accepting it. Well, normally one wouldn't think that the same would apply for school uniforms.

「Sorry I made you wait」

When I arrived at the drawing room, my mother and the tailor were already preparing.

A person for measuring, a person for designing, and a person for accounting.....four people aside from my mother and me. In the meantime, a sample cloth is brought out of a file. There were also some tools which I was unfamiliar with.

I checked again just to confirm, this indeed was a measurement for a middle school uniform. Just that it became this absurd because it was a noble family.

「Well then, please excuse me」

A woman who was young enough to the point where it wouldn't even be strange to call her onee-san wrapped me up to measure my body. I just stood there with my arms slightly spread.

Mother was talking to the person in charge of design during that time.

It's customary to wear the uniform for Avantor Acedemy during the ceremony, afterwards it's optional to wear if you like it. In other words, you can dress however you like.

The girl's uniform is a white frill blouse with a dark blue corset skirt, paired with a white short cape, and an elegant navy blue ribbon.

Males are a white blazer with dark blue slacks, and a navy blue necktie.

By the way, this is the middle school uniform after going up to high school the skirt and slacks turns into a checkered pattern of navy blue and black.

However, there are few students wearing it as it is.

Even though it's cute enough.....since customizing is allowed, people tend to modify it to their own taste. Particularly nobles since things like 『My own original』 or 『The only one in the whole world』 are commonplace.

Usually they only change the cape and ribbon but.....I have seen a student of the high school division, aside from the standard uniform even the skirt was made from a pitch black fabric.

Truthfully I don't particular want to make it different than the standard uniform.....but since we can change however we want.

「.....Yes, it's alright now, thank you very much」

After a few minutes the measurements are over, so the design is next.

Sitting on the sofa and looking at the many different kinds of designs that were brought in as examples, the standard uniform plus the cape and ribbon.....along with cute socks and shoes.

「The skirt itself is cute and navy will match any color.....so let's make a variety of things」

Somehow my mother is more motivated than I am. It seems no matter what age it is, mothers will always like dressing up their own daughters.

「There are plenty of cardigans but it's not a problem, change the colors and patterns.....oh, this is cute!」

「It's a dolman sleeve」

Dolman sleeve, poncho, long cape, long cardigan. I take off one thing only to put on another as designs continued to come out one after another. My mother seemed to be even more pleased than me, adding

this and that along with various other things.

Well I am a girl, so I do appreciate getting to wear all these lovely clothes.

But I do hope this will end sometime soon.....

.....Ah, I forgot to think of countermeasures for after I enter middle school.

Chapter 39: Never Say You Are Happy

As the time passed steadily, the preparations for enrollment were progressing smoothly.

After the uniform measurements are completed, three things are necessary afterwards.

Textbooks, have already been sent so there is no problem.

Simulated Wand, I already have so there is no problem.

Writing utensils, I also already have so there is no problem.

Incidentally other accessories like bags and purses were also left to the tailor along with the uniform. It feels like a waste of money because in reality up to now I have never really needed anything like bags or purses.

Although I have small ones for parties.....they are merely for decoration and not actually a bag. I don't really use them in my daily life. So it has zero functionality.

After asking the tailor to make them, preparations for enrollment will be perfect if the school supplies also arrive.

Next is the preparation for moving.

Upon entering the dormitory of Avantor Academy, the room will not change until graduation to the high school division unless there is a special reason. Because it's a rich school for nobles, a single room will be given to all incoming new students.

You are free to decorate the interior however you like. Thus many people bring their own favorite furniture but I will just use the ones provided by the school. Because there are many other things I have to do I can't be particular about furniture. I don't have any particular complaints as long as it's not too flashy.

That reminds me Mariabell had quite the lavish taste in decorations.....I couldn't even feel the slightest at ease.

My eyes spun quite a bit and I was rather doubtful towards Mariabell's tastes.

In any case, there is no problems with furniture. So it saves me the trouble of one matter.

Even if I go to the academy.....no, even so an appearance befitting of the daughter of a noble is required. Of course, attire is important, as well as etiquette.

Thus, different kinds of clothing must be brought.....though quite a large quantity of them are bulky.

Since I can return home during the weekends or long holidays I have to leave some clothes behind to a certain extent, so the last resort would be to make completely new clothes.

But why are there so many bulky dresses when they can't be worn casually?

The figure makes it impossible to fold, because I can't fold them I am also unable to put them with the rest, there are even numerous adornment items for the dresses.....why must I be swayed by something I may or may not only wear once a year?

Although normally one should have more casual wear so why do I see more dresses? And they're all bulky? Are my casual clothes the only reasonable ones? The designs were made simple by my will.....or they should be.

At least compared to the previous Mariabell.

By the time all preparations were finished, there was around a month left until enrollment.

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Chapter 39: Never Say You Are Happy (2)

「Haa.....」

「Your happiness will run away」

「Yes, it's running away this minute」

「That's not what I meant.....」

I felt alright when I was preparing. I was somehow able to face reality because I was too preoccupied with work.

But when I realized there was nothing more to do, each minute became more and more painful as if I were slowly approaching hell.

「In the first place, I am currently working you know?」

「You are helping your father」

「As an apprentice」

Keito who was older than me already graduated from elementary school and is now helping out his father.

Someday he will become a gardener just like his father, but for now he is still just an apprentice. Since he has recently just finish his training his practical skills is still rather inexperienced.

「It's your lunch break, I heard the time from your father」

「Saying unnecessary things.....」

「Your food is ready」

「Yes-yes.....」

He prepared it while sighing, it seemed it was an unlucky lunch break for him but luckily for me my luck can't go any lower.

Incidentally, we aren't in the usual rose garden but instead in the corner of a garden full of flowers.

We set up a cafe space under a structure with a rounded white roof, a so called gazebo.

We prepared snacks, sandwiches, and three types of desserts. I would like to place emphasis on the word **dessert**. Girls are made of sweet and cute things, someone did say that after all!

「Hm, delicious」

「I know right? I helped out today」

「That's rare, for the cook to permit it」

「Because.....soon it won't be possible to eat together like this anymore」

Within a month or so I will be leaving for Avantor Academy. When that happens, we can't eat lunch together like this or have tea parties in the Rose Garden anymore.

I won't even be able to hear his complaints anymore either.....what will I do if I get a hole in my stomach from stress.

「Even so, Maria knows how to cook?」

「The cook also helped me and I can make it if it's things like sandwiches」

「Usually normal nobles can't even make sandwiches」

When I think about how we are still able to talk this normally in the short amount of time we have left it's quite emotional. The speed of sandwich reduction also slows down.

It's lonely.....also I felt a bit at loss. I won't actually say that out loud because it will make me look stupid.

As I slowly eat my sandwich while thinking about such things, Keito had already finished off four pieces. Because his break is only an hour and since he also was talking to me perhaps he was unable to eat slowly.

Not that it really mattered, so I continued eating. I took the same amount of time as before and ate the same amount.

「Thanks for the meal, it was delicious」

「Sorry if it wasn't to your taste, Keito seems to be eating more recently」

「Is that so? Maria seems to be eating less」

「I have not changed」

Growth period? But I don't feel that he has particularly changed much.....though his face has matured a little.

It then struck me that we can't stay the same forever. Just like how Keito grew up by being with me, it seems like I also changed little by little by being with Keito.

The period of time I can come back from school is limited.....next time we meet, I wonder if we will still recognize each other?

When I thought about that it somehow became hard to leave, I couldn't bring myself to put away the empty dishes.

「Maria-sama, so this is where you went」

「Linda-sensei!」

Whether one is anxious or not, time will still move on as usual.

While I was being slow, it seems that the time of my tutoring had arrived instead of Keito's work. Judging from what Linda-sensei said as she came out of the mansion with slow steps, it seems she searched for me since I wasn't in my room.

「I am sorry, I was unaware of the time」

「No, I just arrived a bit too early」

Just like her footsteps, Linda-sensei's tone was slow so it seems she wasn't angry. I was thinking about how no one came to call me even though the teacher had already arrived, but apparently it seems I wasn't late.

「Today we will be practicing magic, so let's go to the courtyard. Do you have your wand?」

「Yes」

「In that case let's just directly head over to the courtyard」

I actually wanted to watch Keito work since I was still free and thought I'd rather have just done some self-studying, but in the end I eventually gave in and sighed.

I will be going to middle school soon so I wanted to keep learning as much as I still can.

「Well then Keito see you later!」

I tried being as bright as possible and stood up with a smile.

He will also come to see me off when I leave home so I say this because it's not actually goodbye yet. I don't have much time left anyways, so I would like to keep on smiling till the end.

Being solemn doesn't suit me or Keito.

It's not like we will never see each other again.....or at least that's how it's suppose to be. I can't be certain because the place I am heading to is filled with my death flags.

No, I will do my best with all my power.

「Ah, hey, you forgot your wand!」

「Eh?」

As I was heading back with Linda-sensei, Keito's voice suddenly calls out to me just as I turned my back.

I looked back quickly upon hearing the words, I have my wand.....I looked at my empty hand which should have been holding the wand.

Keito uttered 「You always like this」 because I wasn't paying attention I had carelessly left the wand I had brought along with me.....what a failure.

「You were just talking about it a while ago how did you forget it」

He seemed to be really exasperated as he said that and then gave a sigh.

Uuu.....it's too harsh to retort. To even forget the tool that I needed to use now, I am even surprised at myself.

「Here, be careful」

「Sorry, and thank——」

Uu, it didn't come out. Or rather I was unable to say it.

Keito had brought the wand over to me and as he reached his arms out to hand it over, at that moment.

The wand suddenly glowed, and the next moment there was a bouquet of flowers in Keito's hand where the wand should have been.

Pink and yellow statice in the middle, along with margarets, lilacs, and golden oxeyes.

It has zero unity.

There is also flowers that have vines around them, I think it's probably ivy. It's an aftereffect of being together with Keito whose father is a gardener and since he is familiar with flowers I also have some knowledge of flowers. I don't have as much confidence when compared to Keito though.

I had involuntarily concentrated on the flowers to avoid reality.....but it's about time I came back.

Keito is stuck in a position of presenting out flowers to me.

I also learned how to produce flowers from the tip of the wand, it's one of the basic magic skills. It also leads to attribute magic, it's essentially fundamental.

But even so, it's only capable of making flowers bloom from the tip of the wand and couldn't produce such a bouquet.

「What..is.....this?」

「.....is this?」

Keito seemed to be completely dumbfounded from the situation.....but one thought came to my mind. I learned about it in one of Linda-sensei's lessons, the ability to communicate with plants. It's said that even unknown plants can be produced if you have that ability.

But Keito shouldn't have that ability.

If I recall there shouldn't have been such an event.

That's right, when Greas-sensei was here.

「.....Linda-sensei, ano」

「I will call the head and his father」

As expected, Linda-sensei is calm, unlike me who was surprised and fled reality. She probably didn't want to leave us when were both frozen in shock.

Seeing that I had returned, with her usual smile she gave a bow and headed back into the mansion at her usual pace.

.....Eh, are you leaving behind Keito?

Well, it's fine anyways.

「.....Keito is your arm alright?」

「.....It's a bit hot and heavy」

「Right, let's sit down for the time being」

I received the bouquet and wand from Keito's hand and then handed the bouquet back to Keito.

Even after I took the wand from Keito and even after I removed the bouquet from the wand the flowers didn't wither, so I would say my prediction is likely accurate.

I pushed the still confused Keito into the gazebo and the bouquet was placed onto the table.

「Are you okay? How do you feel?」

「Oh, I am completely.....just a bit confused」

「It's no wonder, I was even surprised」

「……This is that right?」

「Probably, it's likely what Keito is thinking」

Keito knows about what happened with Greas-sensei, because he also keeps me company he also has knowledge about magic. So he can probably guess what the previous matter was about.

「Linda-sensei said she is going to call both of our fathers, it cannot be concluded without doing an examination but……probably, there is no doubt」

「……Right」

「Your not……fine are you?」

「No, I was surprised but……that's all」

Isn't he sitting a bit too far?

I thought about whether he was just pretending to be tough……but Keito's eyes didn't seem to contain any anxiety or doubt.

「Nature will take it's own course…… I learned not to worry about things from watching Maria」

「Give me back my concerns」

This person just made of fun of me a little didn't he? He trampled on my kindness. It's most definitely the usual Keito with his particular way of kindness.

「Don't worry, I don't mean it in a bad way」

「What's with that self-confidence?」

「Rather than shock, it's more important that I can go to the same place as Maria」

「……We're still not sure yet though」

「I know」

It was an irritating laugh. He is definitely enjoying my reaction and laughing about it. I wanted to take revenge, but then his laughter subsided so I stopped.

After that, my father and Keito's father came and Keito was taken for an examination. I had class with Linda-sensei so I left.

I had insisted I wanted to go with him……neither my father nor Keito's father had said anything but Keito had replied 「I don't need you」 so I ended up not going.

The result of the examination came out at night.

Needless to say, we started hastily preparing his enrollment and move to the dormitory the next day.

Chapter 40: Last fortress.....or not

Warm sunshine, fragrant flowers, refreshing wind.

Innocent boys and girls dressed in brand new uniforms.

Usually one would be smiling and thinking the start of youth to be a joyous occasion, but I carried a dark cloud over me unlike the rest.

Mariabell Tempest, 12 years old.

I am now a first year of Avantor Academy starting from today.

「Maria, we should leave soon」

「Three more minutes.....」

「This is the seventh time already, homeroom will be starting soon」

Keito's uniform is noticeably wrinkled as I clenched it with both my hands. Approximately 30 minutes have passed and I was blocking Keito's way.

It looked like a scene in front of the dorm where a girlfriend was fretting about separating from her lover. What should I do this behavior is objectively troublesome even in my point of view. Of course, this is actually not a farewell scene of two love-sick idiotic couples.

Keito will be starting off as a second year transfer student and will be heading directly to his classroom, and as a new student I will be attending the ceremony.

I am afraid of going to the entrance ceremony alone, that is somewhat a reason.....but more than anything, I am uneasy about Keito heading off to class.

If he were to end up in the classroom of the second prince or in the classroom of that overly dark yandere, when I think about that.....!

「Maria too, being late to the entrance ceremony is a bad way to start」

「Un.....」

I was unable to counter after that just argument.

What is with this? Recently it feels like Keito has been treating me like a child, to begin with he was always more composed and realistic, and he did always play the role of the straight-man.

In the end after giving my head a pat, Keito then headed off towards his classroom.

I was left alone.....I then headed towards the hall where the entrance ceremony will be held with heavy footsteps.

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「E -tto, Class C is.....」

While I looked restlessly around the lavishly decorated hall, I try to find my seat while looking through the student handbook I received from the reception desk.

For the entrance ceremony of Avantor Academy, students have to look for their own seats by themselves. Students aren't provided with information regarding their own class beforehand. One is to find their own seat in time and then wait for the ceremony to start. The student handbook I received at

the reception desk before entering the hall had a list of all the names in the class, so today is my first time knowing my own class.

Because Avantor Academy is where the rich gather, such countermeasures are placed to prevent parent's from scheming beforehand.....or so I've heard.

Is something like that really true.....perhaps, reality can sometimes be stranger than fiction. I have been living in this otome world as a villainess for the past twelve years after all.

「Ah, there」

Down the stairs, the third row from the front. The words Class C were written underneath like in a movie theater. I sat down in the assigned seat based on the attendance number.

There are quite a few people who have already arrived earlier but it seems the person I am looking for still isn't here yet. Since the entrance ceremony is about to start it'll likely be soon.

I probably don't even have to mention who I am looking for.

「Good morning! Oh, you are in the same class, nice to meet you ー!」

I heard a bright voice and then several other voices respond back.

They might've been friends from the start. Those who share the joy of being in the same class, this is the beginning of youth. The atmosphere surrounding them looks rather heartwarming as they smiled about.

The only person whose entire body was frozen stiff as if they were someone frantically awaiting their love is probably only me.

「Sasha, where was the class?」

A new group of male students appeared, and the one they are talking to in the center.

Sasha.

That is the nickname of the person I was looking for since a while ago. 『I have been wanting to meet you』 is not what I was thinking instead 『I want to avoid if it's possible』 is more closer to what I am thinking.

Sasha, or Sashia Dorothy.

A refreshingly handsome male with red hair along with red eyes tinged with orange.

And the last capture target which I haven't encountered yet.

Chapter 41: Heading to the Battlefield

Though he was a fellow classmate going by his social position Sashia isn't a noble and is instead a commoner however his grandfather is also the world's best magician.

Avantor Academy places emphasis on financial strength rather than status so although he is a commoner his position isn't so different from nobles.

But as usual nobles are troublesome when it comes to social status. The academy consisted of daughters and sons of nobles who grew up watching their parents, if parents are concerned about their status then naturally their children will also be the same.

Even though he is the bloodline of the world's best magician, a commoner is a commoner. So it's nothing strange if people look down on Sashia because of his status.....but judging from the past five rounds that didn't seem to be the case.

As far as I know, there aren't any people who openly look down upon him.

Fiery red hair. Orange-red eyes that are reminiscent of flames. A refreshing smile, a handsome male or for short ikemen.

And just like his smile he is a refreshing and popular person.

It was risky competing with someone who is so popular and attractive. Everyone would just consider it as unreasonable jealousy if they were to see it. Also it would only be further enhanced because Sashia is popular.

And above all, even though his status is below a nobles his grandfather is still the world's best magician. It wouldn't be wise to make light of something like that for someone who is about to learn magic.

Such love is a part of youth itself.

Just like how transfer students fall in love with popular classmates, truly a royal road.

And to add more color to that royal road story his "grandfather" and "Mariabell".

Although the current Sashia is a bright, refreshing and popular person, he wasn't always like that to begin with.

The pressure from having such a great grandfather. The fear of his magic not living up to expectations increased with each age.

And his confidence decreasing due to increasing expectations.

He is somewhat like Niel, but contrary to Niel who was socially withdrawn, Sashia instead went out of his way to forge many relationships.

One avoids the public eye due to lack of confidence.

Another attracts the public eye due to lack of confidence.

The saying to each their own is well said, the truth ended up being reversed.

Ah, by the way in his route because Mariabell liked Sashia she had manipulated him into getting engaged with her. The feelings were pure but the behavior was impure and indeed that of a villainess.

In the happy ending the house collapsed, in the bad ending her whereabouts became unknown.
Yes, it is peaceful. Compared to a certain yandere at least I will not be killed.

Of course, it's still not good either way just better. I still don't want to be in the same class as him.
Therefore, as much as I looked forward to this day at the same time I still wanted to desperately escape.

And if Sashia ended up not in the same class then at least it would be a relatively peaceful year.
Conversely, if Sashia ended up being in the same class then I would need to face it like a soldier heading off to the battlefield.

And the result was —

「I am Sashia Dorothy, it's a pleasure to meet you!」

「……I am Mariabell Tempest」

I heard a voice next to me and I felt like praising myself for replying even though a feeling of despair had crushed me.

Even though I had tried escaping from reality it still ended up in failure

I wanted to let loose my anger on the smiling Sashia but he didn't do anything wrong. I understand, I really did understand. I can't do anything regarding the classes as it's already predetermined by something called fate.

Even so, it's still impossible for me to accept the current situation as it's something I hate!

Instead of my current feeling being like a soldier headed off for the battlefield it would be more accurate to say it's like a soldier that was captured captive by an enemy country.

Chapter 42: It has been a while

In conclusion, I ended up in the same class as Sashia.

That alone was still acceptable. Certainly under all the “bad developments” this is neither bad or good, and to begin with the probability was one-third. When I think of the probabilities there is no helping it.

It’s just why does he have to be seated next to me?!

What’s going on with the seating arrangements? Mariabell’s M and Sashia’s S are not that close.....aah, that’s why he’s seated so close!

「.....I’m tired」

After completing the entrance ceremony, by the time my homeroom ended when I left the classroom, my HP was nearly zero. It’s only the first day yet I am so tired already.

I trudged through the corridor under this feeling of fatigue and headed towards the school’s dining hall, it is used as a cafe till closing time except during lunch hours. The interior is so beautiful that I can’t imagine it being inside a school, though it makes it easy to understand how rich schools spend their money. But at least it’s not just an upstart lucrative decorating hobby.

I will meet with Keito here and after having lunch we will explore the school.

I ordered a milk tea from the waiter who was standing near the entrance and then sat down near the closest window from the entrance.

Shortly, a little round teacup was brought over containing a beige-colored liquid. Un, it’s sweet and has a delightful scent.

Ahh, I feel refreshed.....

「Maria」

「.....Eh?」

Along with the warm sweetness I also felt a sense of recovery but suddenly there was a knocking sound on the table, I was startled by the voice and nearly spilled the contents of the cup. At the same time I also spat a bit out.

I was flustered, but more than anything surprised by the voice.

I turned towards the voice in a panic and the owner of the voice stood there.

「G-Greas-sensei?」

「It has been a while」

「Y-Yes, it’s been a while」

The person standing there was smiling more brightly than I remembered but it was without a doubt Greas-sensei.

When we last saw each other he was still a child but now he was already a full grown adult. The boyish appearance had disappeared, and his childish cuteness was nowhere to be found.

Rather, hasn’t he grown too much? He didn’t seem so tall according to my memories.....probably around 180cm, it’s making my neck hurt.

It really has been a while.....but what was he doing here?

「Greas-sensei, what are you doing here?」

「I heard from Kirua-sama that Maria had enrolled」

「From father?」

I knew that my father and Greas-sensei were contacting each other. During the process of hospitalization for Greas-sensei's mother, it seems he acted as the guardian on behalf of the sickly mother.

My father hadn't mention anything regarding Greas-sensei after he had graduated from the high school division.....to think they still kept in touch.

「I am beginning my high school division training starting this year, so I thought I would celebrate」

「Training?」

「Training for becoming a teacher at Avantor Academy」

Yes, I know that.....but was that how one becomes a teacher? Don't you need to have a teaching license.

Wondering about it, I asked Greas-sensei but conversely he was confused with the word "teaching license".

Apparently there seems to be no teaching license in this world. Rather it seems this "concept" didn't exist.

Instead of licensing, it seems a form of training where they would be directly placed into the workforce was mainstream. As a result, the quicker one can adapt to their training the faster one can become a professional, but conversely if one didn't adapt to their training even after many years.....they would be fired from their training due to poor results.

It's a lot more heavier than just obtaining a license.

「I first taught the middle school division for two years, and it seems my training will be over in another two years if everything goes well in the high school division. After I complete my training I hope to perhaps become a holy attribute magic teacher for the high school division」

Yes, I know that. For me, it's a transition that happens once I move up to the high school division after all.

It's how the original flow of the story went. It doesn't surprise me since I was already aware of it.

「Well then.....congratulations on your admission, Maria」

「T-thank you very much!」

I was presented with a gift at the same time he congratulated me, it was a lovely pink bag tied with a golden ribbon.

When I received it I felt a hard feeling through the bag. But it didn't seem to be anything heavy. Immediately opening it, a cute barrette appeared from within.

「Uwaa.....how cute!」

It was decorated with flowers containing colorful stones on a metallic ribbon, a cute but elegant design. I really liked it.

「Was it to your liking?」

「Yes! Is it really fine for me to have it?」

「Of course, I cannot use it even if I have it」

Well that's true. Then thank you for the gift.

I had actually wanted a decorative hair ornament that I could gather my hair up with. Everyday when I was at home I would have my hair ironed straight by Anne, but since I lived at the dormitories now I cannot ask her anymore.....and I don't feel like doing it myself, it's too troublesome.

I just wanted to pin my hair half up, because it's spreads easily since I have naturally curly hair. Nice timing Greas-sensei.

「I actually wanted something just like this, I will use it with great care!」

「What a relief, I was wondering what I would do if it didn't suit Maria's taste」

Seemingly relieved, Greas-sensei lightly massaged his shoulder . I had thought that because the original Greas-sensei had a flirtatious and seducing atmosphere he could easily predict what girls like..... is this perhaps a difference from the original or will he become like that in the future?

I don't know which it is but I have something I am more worried about right now.

「Ano, Greas-sensei」

「Yes?」

「.....Will you stop being so formal?」

「Eh.....?」

Even though he was calling me Maria without any problems, up till now he was being really formal. Although there were no honorifics it was still discomfoting.

It would defeat the purpose of calling me Maria if he still acted all formal, it seems my thoughts were not transmitted.

「Greas-sensei is not my tutor anymore and is now a real teacher」

「I am still in training」

「But you are planning to become a teacher for the high school division right?」

Although Avantor Academy is a rich school, teachers are generally familiar towards their students..... honorifics, formal language, and such are not usually enforced. But there is also individual character, so it is not prohibited either.

Social status or financial status doesn't dictate everything. Of course, this is just on the outside.

No matter how much you promote equality, in reality there are still adults who pay attention to the princes or students from the upper aristocracy. With age comes the understanding of the weight of the meaning "status".

That's why Mariabell's bullying had expanded to criminal levels.

There are good teachers though.....including Greas-sensei.

Therefore, hurry up and stop with the formal language! My original discomfort is slowly becoming unbearable.

「Let's start over from the beginning alright?」

「.....Hah, I understand. Is this better?」

「Yes!」

If I don't get rid of his formal way of speaking he will begin to sound like the capture target Greas.....though it may be too late now.

Chapter 43: Exploring Explorers

Just like that me and Greas-sensei continued our conversation without the previous formality. Then I heard footsteps approaching from behind and when I turned around to look.

「Maria, sorry I made you wait.....Greas-sesei?」

「.....Keito-kun? You're Kaito-san's son correct?」

「Yes, it's been a while」

「Yes, it has been quite long, you seem to have grown a lot bigger」

Because we were meeting it seems like Keito had rushed over in a hurry.

Contrary to Keito's dumbfounded expression to meeting an unexpected person, Greas-sensei had only widened his eyes in surprise for a moment even though Keito was also here at the academy. But Greas-sensei knows that Keito is a commoner and not from a wealthy family.....

「Both Maria and Keito-kun's admission were written in the letter」

As if he had already knew my doubts, Greas-sensei answered my question before I even asked. I see so that's why.

My father loves me but he also likes my childhood friend Keito very much too. Unlike nobles like me that have been prepared to enter this school since birth, Keito's decision to enter was rather abrupt, it's even more worrying since Keito also decided to live at the dormitories.

Even though Greas-sensei was still a trainee, father probably felt more relieved with him being here to check up on things. Though whether Keito himself really agreed to this is another story.

「What will you two be doing?」

「Let's go explore around the school a little, I was fine with going alone but since Keito is also here let's go together」

「I am also unfamiliar with the school since I just enrolled by the way」

「I see you two are close as usual」

Greas-sensei had resigned as my tutor.....about five years ago?

Apparently the relationship between me and Keito seems unchanged even after five years. It is true there isn't really much change.

Ah, but recently Niel also joined our group so there should be some change.

「Well then since I have fulfilled my purpose, I suppose I will be going」

「Are you leaving already?」

「I was initially just planning on giving Maria the entrance celebration gift after all. Besides it's not good for trainees to wander around on their own too much」

The security at Avantor Academy is quite strict since many important bloodlines regardless of their status are gathered here.

Upon entering the academy, unless your the prince you are not allowed to have any escorts. Since the

academy has both a high school and middle school division, and most of the students live in the dormitories, the teachers cannot monitor everyone. There is the option to hire more personnel but if too many people enter and exit the academy security will end up being hindered.

For that reason, Avantor Academy is designed so everything can be done within the school premises. In the premises of the school aside from the academy there is also a town where items necessary for daily life are available, it would be easier to understand if you imagine an entire district surrounded by castle walls. Incidentally the name of the town is called “Oztown.”

It seems the purpose was to reduce the risk of kidnapping by eliminating the need for students to go outside the school grounds.

Thus due to this design the newcomer trainees are the ones that security are most vigilant of. Rather than becoming teachers for the sake of the school, there seems to be quite a few people who try to become teachers just to cause a commotion.

For that reason, there are restrictions placed on the trainees and they are not allowed to go wherever they want. Of course this isn’t severely enforced but one would usually not try to do anything too conspicuous that would upset their superiors.

「Well then, I will be seeing you two later」

「Yes, see you later」

「Thank you very much for the gift, let’s meet again」

I waved goodbye to Greas-sensei who also waved back in return.

I wonder when’s the next time we will meet again.....even if he couldn’t come to the middle school too often we could still meet at Oztown, at that time I will have to express my gratitude.

「This is?」

「Greas-sensei gave this to me just a while ago」

That said, I showed Keito the barrette on the palm of my hand.

The flowers made with red, pink, yellow, and orange stones of various colors shine brilliantly just by changing the angle slightly, it is very beautiful and cute.

Imagining Greas-sensei picking out items that a girl may like is a somewhat interesting scene, because it also suits it’s even more so.

「It’s a sweet pea」

「What?」

「That flower, it’s a sweet pea」

Keito pointed at my palm, or to be precise the flower on the barrette in my palm. The shape of the petals looked like a butterfly and was very cute.

Apparently sweet pea seems to be the name of this flower.

I also know the name but I didn’t know the actual flower itself because I never saw one before.

「Sweet pea.....」

In the floral language it means “departure” so it’s perfect for an entrance celebration. It also stands for “blissful pleasure” and “lovely memories”.

「That’s right」

Keito’s father is a gardener and I also studied with him before so knowing about flowers is rather nice. I have known him for a long time so it’s not surprising.

But I think a male middle school student who knows so much about flowers is actually quite rare.

「As expected of Keito, you did study to become a gardener after all」

「Though now I am studying magic, but knowing the flower and it’s meaning makes it easier for me to produce them」

「I see」

He has a promising and happy future.

But in truth he’s supposed to just be an apprentice gardener at home. It makes me wonder a bit after thinking that. Though there’s no point in telling Keito this as there’s no reason for him to worry about it.

Greas-sensei aside, Keito’s situation seems to have been completely due to me.....

「Maria?」

「Eh.....?」

「Are we going?」

「Ah.....yes, let’s go」

This won’t do I nearly became too absorbed in my thoughts. Our goal is to explore the school, and still have enough time to head back so we cannot be too leisurely.

We left the dining hall with a simple map on the student notebook in hand. I didn’t completely finish my milk tea but.....I’m sorry it was delicious.

「There doesn’t seem to be as many unique classrooms as I thought」

Compared to the size of the academy, the number of classrooms on the map feels quite low.

No, considering that there are separate high school buildings, aren’t the buildings a bit too large?

「Aren’t the sizes larger than the actual space needed?」

「.....I see」

It’s true that the classrooms were large. Though it’s not really a problem since the seats and desks were very luxurious and the kind that took up a lot of space.

Since I came from a noble household somehow it is easier for Keito who came from a commoner household to notice these types of things.

Anyways, I do appreciate the lower amount of buildings, less work for us.

With the student handbook’s map in hand me and Keito headed towards the areas with unique classrooms.

Chapter 44: Escaping Loneliness

Music room. Science room. Art room.

We see these room names while checking our path. The names seem ordinary but since magic is involved in the lessons it is actually not as ordinary as it sounds.

About halfway through our exploration, I checked the time and it seems we still have some time left to spare before school is over.....at that moment I suddenly remembered why I was planning to meet up with Keito.

「Speaking of which, how was your class?」

「.....Isn't the question rather late?」

「I didn't hear anything about it though」

I was thinking of asking him as soon as we met in the dining hall, but I ended up completely forgetting about it after the appearance of the new character Sashia and the surprise from Greas-sensei.

After our entrance, I was worried about Keito who enrolled at the last minute and how he was adjusting.....espicially since Keito's grade also had many unsettling elements to it. Ah, but mostly all because of a certain person. Because he and the prince are childhood friends I don't want to become too involved with them.

Well the reason is also because I am taking precautions against his overly attaching "love" but at the same time I just don't want to actively associate with him either.

「Nothing.....nothing in particular happened. I introduced myself normally, answered some questions and that was all」

「Did you make any friends?」

「I cannot make any right away on the first day with my personality」

Please don't say that yourself.....was what I wanted to say, but if I handled this poorly it would just come back to bite me.

「How about talking with the person sitting next to you?」

As expected, in this sort of situation the person sitting next to him would be the one most likely to become his friend.

Though in my case I couldn't bring myself to do so since I was sitting next to Sashia. Sashia himself would probably try to befriend me but I would like to refrain. Because I am afraid of accidentally raising a flag after all.

「Oh, the person sitting next to me is the prince actually so I can't really speak to him all causally」

「Wh-.....!!」

A bomb was just tossed forth without any hesitation. Because I wasn't prepared for it I ended up stumbling a bit.

Keito-san, did you just say the prince?

Eh, he probably meant prince as in an incredibly handsome ikeman who was worthy of being called that right? He couldn't possibly mean a real-life prince like the one where it could be written down as an occupation right? I'm begging you please don't make me face such a reality!
But it seems my wish wasn't conveyed telepathically over to Keito.

「I think it was Prince Runa? He's quite amazing and really gives off the impression of a prince」

「.....Yes, I know that」

I met him, I talked to him, I was even selected as his fiancée candidate. I believed I was smoothly removed from the fiancée candidate selection because I hadn't been contacted since then.

Rather, Keito even you too?

Not only me but even my childhood friend is involved with this next door neighbor capture target-san. I even got him involved during the time with Niel.....no, even during the time with Greas-sensei. Keito also knows about Tuvalu but that's only because I complained about him to Keito. Hm? Isn't he rather involved then? Though it's mainly all due to me.

「Rather than me what about Maria?」

「Eh?」

「You also need to make some friends」

「.....」

This guy is really direct isn't he? If he wasn't my childhood friend I would've made him suffer a great pain by dealing a clean hit right to him.
But because I've known him for a long time, I understand that he is just genuinely worried about me.

「I am a male and I am fine with it since that's just how I am, but Maria cannot do that」

「I'm really glad that you actually understand me.....」

Both Keito and I aren't frantic about making friends because of our personalities.

Close and deep is our ideal, we are satisfied with having just a few close friends. Even during the time with Niel, I had helped him since I was asked but we also became friends because we liked each other. Otherwise I wouldn't have continued holding tea parties even after his reclusive state had improved. He's a capture target after all, it would've been a hassle.
But unlike Keito I cannot just stay alone all by myself just because something is troublesome.

The difference between Keito and I.....put briefly is our social status.

Unlike Keito who is a commoner, a noble like myself is required to have the ability to communicate. Especially since I'm a female along with being a noble's daughter, the process of socializing is also an important element.

Thus being all alone by myself in middle school.....is a bit of a problem.

「Before worrying about others worry about yourself first」

「Yes.....」

『I'll listen if you have anything you want to talk about』 he could've been trying to comfort me.....
but in the meantime we finished our exploration and headed back to the dormitories side by side.

Chapter 45: I Don't Need a 100, But at Least One or Two People!

The next day, I sat alone at my seat while observing my classmates. Even though it's still only the second day everyone is going on about how they should customize their uniform, as expected clothes define personality. I am just following my mother's tastes though.

In the first place, I have never been one to go about actively making friends. There was only Keito and Niel.

Yes, they are both boys. I don't have any female friends.

How would I go about making a female friend? I have little energy to even make any friends in the first place let alone a female one. There are other reasons of course.

「Mariabell-sama, good morning—!」

「Gokigen'yo, Sashia-sama」

「Morning Sasha —」

The person sitting next to me is quite popular.....people immediately gathered around in response to the voice greeting me.

Everyone is so lively.....the mentally old me is unable to keep up. Keito treats me like a child though, but this and that are different matters.

Especially since I know absolutely nothing about how middle school girls are. I just think boys are easier to understand. Or rather for me, just when comparing males to females.

What to do.....I wonder.

There's just really no other way to make friends! Or at least I can't think of any other way. During the time when I was trying to become friends with Niel, I did say several times that it's important to be able to talk with others.

It's just that there is one slight problem.

I.....I think I might be a little scared.

There's about four years left until the start of the game scenario.

Considering the growth rate of females, it seems that my appearance is slowly becoming that of “the villainess Mariabell”.

A mature beautiful looking girl. Though in reality, she has a bewitchingly attractive face unsuited for her age with naturally sharp glaringly eyes that combines both beauty and evilness.

The difference between the former and latter is rather amazing, but it's the truth. Anyhow, it won't be long before I reach that point.

I also knew how others thought of me due to the experiences from the past five rounds.

Whenever I think about that it makes me not want to speak out too carelessly.

The beginning is critical, first impressions are very important after all. I'm already losing points due to my appearance so I have to recover them through other areas.

It would be the most easiest to just talk with the person sitting next to me but.....it goes without saying that is instantly rejected.

My seat is in the middle of six rows. One side is Sashia, but on the other side is another person.

Moreover, a girl!

She's not here yet, but let's first start off with a greeting and see how it goes from there. Because I was distracted by Sashia yesterday I don't remember what kind of girl she was.....it would be nice if she isn't the really assertive type though. I would be at a loss if someone like Francia-sama were to come.

Bearing expectations and anxiety, after a few minutes of waiting in slight desperation.

「Gokigen'yo, Mariabell-sama」

A voice came from beside me.

From the side opposite of Sashia, a cute girl's voice sounded out.

Chapter 46: Words That Freeze My Insides

「G-G-Gokigen'yo」

This is bad, my voice was a bit shrill.

Because I answered on reflex I didn't have time to hide my actual self. Even though I mentioned how important the first impression is.

「.....? 」

「I'm sorry, it's nothing」

As expected, she gave me a blank look. Although I smiled to distract her.

I slowly exhaled to calm myself and looked towards her.

Long blonde hair with three braids on the side with a cute looking butterfly pin attached. She had round dark brown eyes which slanted downwards, a fresh new student. She was dressed rather ordinarily wearing the standard uniform and blouse with a bright green cardigan around the skirt.

It wasn't very gaudy but it was still nice, the ideal words describing her would be neat, tidy, and cute.

.....Those were my honest thoughts. And I also felt very relieved.

I was just thinking what I should do if she turned out to be someone very flashy and luxurious like Mariabell.

If I handled this poorly it would turn out just like the game. So far it seems there is nothing to worry about.....unless she is the type that is different from how she appears.

The first impression is important, but it is not always right. Including me.

.....Hm, did she just call me by my name?

「Ano.....」

「Yes」

「How did you know my name.....?」

I haven't introduced myself yet have I?

「Oh.....because they called out everyone's name at yesterday's entrance ceremony, that's why」

Eh, lies, I don't remember. Because I was too focused on Sashia the entire entrance ceremony.....

What should I do? I don't remember this child's name.

「Is that so.....I am sorry, I do not remember your name」

I wanted to pretend that I knew her name, but there aren't any name tags on the school uniforms and she didn't have one attached to her bag so I gave up.

It was rather rude but.....it was still better than lying about it and making things worse.

「No, I did try to remember everyone's name but.....Mariabell-sama is famous after all」

「Eh.....?」

Famous? Eh, I didn't hear anything about this. I would like to stay plain and simple so that I can spend my school life peacefully.

「 You discovered the dormant attributes of two people after all 」

That is.....w-!!!

Yes, that is quite conspicuous. I was involved with two people who both previously didn't show any signs of attributes! But it's not like I purposely discovered them it was one-hundred percent total coincidence!

「 No, I..... 」

「 In addition, you were even selected as a fiancée candidate for Prince Runa, everyone has been paying attention to you 」

「 That is, I am.....w- 」

Hm? What? Wait what!?

I do apologize but there was a word which I didn't really understand.

Fi-an-cee ca-nid-ate? Eh, sorry I don't know the meaning of that word. Rather, I don't want to know. I would like to activate my pointless ignoring skill. But if I do that it would leave a rather troubling impression.

「 Etto.....it's true that I was selected as a candidate before, but I believe I've already been removed though? 」

So please don't make any strange misunderstandings.

「 Prince Runa has plenty of fiancée candidates, I was only just barely selected as one of them 」

「 Is that so? 」

「 Yes 」

Alright, I managed to convince one person for the time being. I would be happy if this rumor started spreading out from this point.

It would be counterproductive to prolong this any further, so let's end this discussion right here.

Above all I would like to learn this child's name soon.

「 Etto.....so, what is your name? 」

Even I think this is quite awkward myself.

I don't really think I am a shy type of person, it's just that I am not use to talking with people.

Hm, doesn't that mean I am shy? When compared with the capture targets everyone here isn't that scary, or at least that's what I first thought but.....rather isn't it strange to be comparing them with the capture targets in the first place?

「 Oh, I'm sorry, my name is Primera Elga 」

「 Primera..-sama.....I will be in your care from here on out 」

Anyhow, I managed to obtain my seat neighbor's name.

Chapter 47: Thank You Greas-sensei!

Primera Elga-chan. My seat neighbor and friend...candidate.

I managed to learn her name somehow, but from here on out is the real fight.

Well then, how do I become friends with her?

I don't really have any various topics to talk about. If I recall correctly she didn't appear in the game either.

In the game, the friends of Mariabell were essentially just simple and plain "henchmen of the villainess".

Their appearances and status were all inferior to Mariabell's. However, they were more flashy than all the other average students, they moved in a collective group fashion and upheld absolute hierarchy order. They have essentially no individuality other than standing out from their leader.

And above all, they were people who would utilize the powers of those above themselves to throw their weight around until something goes wrong.

At the end of the game as soon as Mariabell had fallen to ruin, they started screaming that all the cruel actions they had done until now were all under the "orders of Mariabell", her dozen or more so friends all brilliantly gave her the backhand.

They are truly a unique sort of friends. Mariabell is without exception a scum but I think her so-called friends are also no better. At the very least, it made me not want to make any friends until the sixth round, none at all!

I don't remember all of them because there were so many people, but for the time being it seems her former friends that I do remember aren't in the same class. I've only attended three classes thus far so maybe I just haven't recognized them yet.

Well then, after reviewing all the past rounds up to now.

I wonder what I should do.....now that I think about it I've never actually tried making friends on my own before...as Mariabell. Up till now a follower would always just arbitrarily come forth.

[.....]

[.....?]

Hm.....she is staring quite intensely at me isn't she?

[.....Ano, is there something you need?]

[Eh, ah.....um]

It seems that she only just noticed after I told her. She jumped and had a startled expression.

Rather than saying she was staring at me.....was she staring at my back.

[I-I'm sorry, that was impolite of me.....]

[It's alright, I don't mind. I was just wondering if there was something on me]

Was I perhaps too preoccupied with my thoughts and had a strange atmosphere about me?

[No, it's not that.....ano, the hair ornament]

「Hair.....? 」

I instinctively thought of imo-kenpi, but I immediately dispelled that distraction. Imo-kenpi didn't exist in this world after all, probably.

The hair ornament I'm wearing today is the sweet pea barrette I received from Greas-sensei yesterday. I have my stubborn naturally curly hair half up today so it felt maintained a bit. Or that's just how I felt.

「It's just really cute so it caught my attention」

「Oh.....thank you very much」

「It's a sweet pea, isn't it? If I recall in the language of the flowers it means.....departure」

「Yes, I received this as a celebration of my admission from an acquaintance of mine」

A girl's talk, I am having a girl's talk!

It also feels fresh because the other party isn't Keito.

.....Hm, but didn't I also talk with Keito about flowers as well? It was for studying reasons but Keito also likes gardening himself.

「Primera-sama seems familiar with flowers」

「N-Not at all, I am not that familiar.....!」

No, no, you were familiar enough that you knew about the flower's language. I wouldn't have even known that this flower is a sweet pea if it weren't for Keito.

I just like hair ornaments and other types of accessories.....I also make some myself」

「Oh my, that's impressive!」

She actually does look like she might be the type to be good at sewing and the likes.....rather than the traits of a girl it seems more like the traits of a housewife, she might even be good with cooking too.

But there are actually very few people in this school that are like that. The daughters of nobles along with daughters of rich commoners, there are many girl's that use servants to masquerade their inability in these sorts of areas.

Though in my case it's a bit special.....which in turn also makes it actually not special. Even so I would still count as one of the few people in this school who can do such things.

Ah, of course Mariabell is definitely not one of them. She wouldn't even be able to make disgusting-tasting food, as her feminine traits in this area is at the point where she wouldn't even touch the ingredients in the first place.

「Are you perhaps wearing a self-made accessory today?」

「Well, to be honest.....it's quite bad so I am rather embarrassed」

「No need to be so modest, it's very cute that it could even be sold」

When I looked more closely at it, it's actually very well-made.

A butterfly made of stained glass with black borders around it's wings, every time the angle is changed

it also shimmers very beautifully. When I thought of how a middle school student was the one to make this, the word talented appeared in my mind.

「Did you perhaps make others besides that hair ornament?」

「I actually did, next would be this necklace.....」

Afterwards a conversation was strike up to my surprise and it continued on until the teacher arrived. The conversation started with handicrafts and diverted midway, I believe she opened up to me quite a bit towards the end, probably.

I have to thank Greas-sensei later for giving me this conversation starter.

Chapter 48: Everyone has a childhood friend

From our conversation, it seems Primera is the second daughter of a Baron house. That's why she gets nervous talking to me who is the daughter of the Duke.

And it seems she has a hobby in handicrafts. It is rare for a daughter of nobility to be this honest. Most noble daughters would just leave this sort of thing to professionals instead of making it themselves, because there will be many people that will be judging them.

When one hears of noble daughters that likes sewing and making sweets, it tends to be thought of as a cute hobby though in reality they usually just enjoy the end-product rather than the actual process itself. Even though I can only make light snacks among the noble daughters I would still be considered within the category "that can cook", the amount of feminine qualities across noble daughters is quite low.

In that respect, Primera seems to be a very good child. The type of noble daughters that everyone envisions, at the very least she is the type that I really like! Ah, of course not in the romantic way. Even though I am a bit desperate in making friends, there would be no point in pursuing friendship if our personalities are incompatible. That was my train of thought, but it seems Primera is compatible with me.

The hobbies of a regular noble daughter would be holding tea parties or shopping for foreign products.....I don't really have many hobbies and the reason why I like gardening is due to Keito's influence.

But I was still able to hold a conversation with Primera. I don't know much about handicrafts but I enjoyed listening to her explanations and talking with her.

I still haven't talked that much to her yet, but at least my first impression of her is a very cute and good child.

I'd like to talk more if possible.....but yes, let's take the offensive!

「Primera-sama, do you have any plans for lunch?」

「Plans for lunch?」

Today is still only the second day and there are only classes in the morning, the contents were so boring that I become sleepy from just the explanation.

I've experienced five rounds of the second year of high school, so even though I am a new student I can still predict what would happen. And it was just like I predicted.

As expected, I couldn't really just fall asleep right on the second day after admission. I just heard that I apparently stand out after all.

But somehow I managed to endure through class, and I called out to Primera who was putting away her writing utensils next to me.

The school has lunch available for purchase at the dining hall, the dormitories also have a messroom, and if one goes to Oztown the options are unlimited.

I was hoping we could eat together if possible, but I wonder where Primera was planning to eat.....above all did she perhaps already have prior plans?

「I was planning on heading over to the school's dining hall, if your fine with it would you like to join me?」

「Eh.....?」

「Of course, I won't force you if you don't want to.....」

「N-Not at all! If Mariabell-sama is alright with it then I'd love to」

What a relief, my heart was pounding so rapidly.

After soothing my heart in relief, we began preparing to head out.

I went and left the textbook I was using today back in my locker.....leaving everything at school is quite convenient isn't it? The game's Mariabell was perfect in regards to that, she felt it was too heavy to take home with her. Ah, but it might be fun to use magic so let's take a bit back with me.

While I was choosing which textbooks to bring back with me at my locker, I heard a voice from behind. Two people, one was Primera and the other was another girl.

In retrospect, Primera was talking to a girl who had brilliant orange hair.

「Eru-chan would you like to come with us for lunch?」

「.....I am fine」

Primera was smiling while she was talking so it's likely the two are acquainted, but the other Orange-chan turned away with a bitter look.

A dispute.....? But Primera looks rather happy, and she's smiling.....

「Primera-sama, I kept you waiting」

As I approached them with a bag on my shoulder, Primera welcomed me with a smile, but Orange-chan had on a deep frown.

Eh, sorry, did I perhaps interrupt something?

「Mariabell-sama, this is my childhood friend Erumeru-chan」

「Oh.....nice to meet you, my name is Mariabell Tempest」

「I know, you're the daughter of the Tempest household and a candidate for the Prince's fiancée 」

「I deny the latter with all my power」

What? Are the rumors that widespread?

Please stop right there, otherwise the demonic childhood friend of the prince who's scarier than a girl mad with jealous will appear.

「Ano, if possible I would also like to invite Eru-chan with us to lunch.....」

「Primera, I am.....」

「Of course! She's more than welcomed」

And my number of friends might even increase!

Also such a cute girl is quite a feast for the eyes.

Erumeru.....Eru-chan has sharp eyes but her face is quite charming, a cute girl with a lively impression and short hair. She is also an unusual type at the school.

「Well then let's head out now, is Erumeru-sama also fine with the dining hall?」

「There is no need to add -sama, I am not a noble」

「Eh.....? 」

「I am just a mere commoner after all」

Chapter 49: Being Good or Bad

I could imagine what she was trying to imply.

A commoner just like Sashia. Sashia has a special position among the commoners, but as for other commoners it's likely easy to imagine.

Nobles look down on commoners. That is generally acknowledged by many people and quite a few people even openly say so.

Even if I am not like that, I have the face of a villainess. So it seems I ended up giving off the wrong impression.

Even if my thoughts are actually different. Thus judgments based on appearance isn't really reliable.

[.....Yes, and?]

[.....Huh?]

[Your a commoner, and?]

[What, that is.....]

[There is no problem so let's go, even seating in the dining hall is not infinite!]

I didn't hear any objections so I lead the way to the dining hall.

But I heard Primera convincing the reluctant Erumeru behind though I pretended not to hear. If I interrupted poorly it will just become even more messy.

Unlike yesterday, there will be many people at the dining hall today.

Although even with all the people it still won't feel cramped because there is just too much space. The size was even more than half of the student body.

People like the prince or Student Council use salons where entrance is restricted, the upperclassmen know when it will become crowded so naturally they leave beforehand, so overall it's a good setup.

There is even a menu list in the dining hall. But since the school is rich that is actually quite normal.....is what I would like to say.

Because apparently even if something isn't listed on the menu it doesn't mean it can't be ordered.

In the dining hall the menu isn't a "Please order from this" but rather a "Please order from this if you cannot decide or please use it as a reference". So the dining hall also accept orders that are not in the menu.

It is truly ridiculous. It's actually quite absurd in many ways.

Because the high school division is also the same I experienced this system for five years already, but those from humble birth.....especially "special" students like Keito are quite perplexed. Although whether Keito himself is actually perplexed is a different story.

And since I am from noble birth I am not unaccustomed to normal anymore. But let's choose from the menu.

[Ah, over there]

After instructing the waiter we just need to sit down and wait. I found a vacant table with appropriate number of seats.

There aren't any number cards like in fast food stores, and showing an identification card instead of money seems to be the alternative.

Yes, I already knew but this is quite the amazing fantasy.....no, this world can only barely reproduce scientific innovations I believe? Even if it wasn't so the driving force in this world is magic.

「It's good we were able to find seats.....there seems to be fewer people than I thought」

「Many people are using the dormitory messhall or going to Oztown so it's likely due to that. So it's likely it will get more crowded once classes fully start」

「I see.....perhaps I should bring my own lunch or something」

Because Primera's childhood friend was nearby, her tone was also more relaxed. It's a good trend, so I will refrain from pointing it out otherwise she might stop.

Just that Erumeru herself was silent and didn't speak at all. Perhaps she was nervous and found it difficult to leave, or maybe she had just given up.....probably the latter.

She still seemed a bit dissatisfied and nervous.....but it seems she was more nervous instead of dissatisfied.

I haven't been a villainess all those years for nothing, I can easily detect a strained atmosphere.

Even though I am able to do it, Mariabell just charged ahead ignorantly so every day was a trial of endurance. Just remembering it sends shivers down my spine.

But thanks to her my perception skill has gone up. Though that doesn't make me happy.

However, I cannot just leave things as they are right now.

I want to befriend her if possible, to be honest I feel like I get along better with commoners rather than nobles. Keito's case is special but even if I remove him.

「.....I think I will just eat somewhere else after all」

「Eh.....?」

While I was thinking about how to start a conversation, Erumeru eye's flickered about as she suddenly spoke up.....she started to say something again but then stopped midway.

「Eru-chan, what's wrong?」

「Did you perhaps mean you wanted to eat elsewhere?」

Her request wasn't heard after all.....but it seemed like she gave up, perhaps my expression made her feel sick? If so, please forgive me as I wasn't thinking of anything weird or the likes.

「It's not like that.....just the surrounding gazes」

Eh, surrounding? So it's not my expression?

I have no idea what she was talking about, but apparently Primera seems to have realized. She had an expression like she had eaten something bitter.

「Primera also realized right?」

It seems I wasn't mistaken about Primera's reaction, Erumeru then continued speaking.
No, but I don't understand what's going on at all? I can't be the only one not comprehending what's going on, right?

「Mariabell-sama is the daughter of the duke and also found the dormant attributes of two people, besides that you're also a fiancée candidate for the prince」

「Former」

I am currently not, I will not concede on that part.

「Among the nobles there are people within the top class famous.....who don't like being around commoners」

The walls between the commoners and nobles. I never thought of myself like that before, the people usually around me are also the type that typically don't worry about what others say. Oresseine-san, Keito, Keito's father, and many other servants. The people around me are all commoners but since they don't mind those sort of things we're all on good terms. Up until the end of the last round everything was just really horrible, being hated by everyone and even not having a mother.....I am really glad I worked hard.

However, I also understand that my surroundings are within the minority. In truth the nobles around me including my father in the past five rounds, and the capture targets were all indulged in themselves. That's why the prince ended up being moved by the heroine who struggled in such a harsh environment without hesitation.

Thus the lively heroine obtained a happy ending while the villainess came to an ill end, and ultimately the wall between social status also began to gradually improve.

Currently it's before the original story, there is no heroine so ultimately I am desperately trying to break the flag.

So in other words, the status barriers have not yet been improved.

That's why Erumeru is worried about my reputation falling by being with her. Though on the other hand.

I actually think she's really just worried about Primera. They are childhood friends and judging from Primera's reaction the two are very close.

She is likely worried about involving Primera since we're together by attracting attention, perhaps she might even be thinking that I will become tired of Primera since she has a commoner childhood friend.

Which is of course untrue. Even though I appear composed right now, I am actually cursing from the very depths of my heart. Being a villainess is hard.

However, regardless of the reason and method, I think it's a good thing to worry about your friends. As a person also with a childhood friend, I can sympathize with her.

But only that part alone.

「Isn't Erumeru being excessively self-conscious?」

Chapter 50: I Like Thrill Rides But

「Wha-.....!？」

「M-Mariabell-sama.....？」

Both of them looked at me with wide-eyes.

Yes, I'm sorry. I also think my words were rather mean, but I didn't mean it in any bad way. It was just purely meant as a question, or perhaps a feeling?

In both shoujo manga and otome games, there is always at least one scenario depicting love between different social classes. It's mostly just interactions between males and females, but let's just ignore that part.

The villainess who spreads false rumors about the heroine to put her down in order to attract the prince. Just like what I saw in Prince Runa's route.

At that time with the heroine.....although I'm quite positive the other party wasn't a girl, but that aside, she is essentially in the same position as the heroine at that time.

However, I had always wondered something about the heroine's behavior at that time.

「It's just that does Erumeru think she is the only person who will affect my reputation？」

Her remark appears as if she is thinking about the other party, but if taken objectively it seems as if she's just talking about her own worth.

Of course the heroine's actions were due to the various rumors spread about her, since Mariabell was aiming to separate them her response is correct in a certain sense but.....in Erumeru's case, no one has said anything to her correct?

Isn't she just being self-depreciating of herself because of the surrounding gazes?

「Beliefs and actual impressions are two different things, and those are just your own thoughts, I didn't wish for such a thing at all」

Erumeru is free to get depressed of her own accord. It's irritating to the mark, but if Erumeru is thinking and acting of her own will then it's up to her to take responsibility for that.

But this time, by acting to be worried about me she ended up pushing responsibility onto me.

I don't know if Erumeru herself knew this or not.....but I suppose probably not.

She appeared genuinely troubled, so I believe she felt this was the best course of action.

But deciding whether the words and actions are right or wrong isn't up to the sending side but rather the receiving side, in this case that would be me.

As for me, I don't want such bothersome matters so please excuse me for destroying it.

「You're saying my reputation will drop because I am with a commoner, but even if you're not here with me my reputation will still drop with good reason. Thus even without you being here I can still end up being looked down on」

That's just how reputation works.

When it drops it will drop no matter what and when it rises it will rise no matter what. The evaluation of people is multifaceted and changes easily just as easily as emotions can change.

In short, it's a waste of time to care. Especially for a person like me who lacks planning abilities. And the main reason why I shouldn't ostracize commoners.

「I have a childhood friend, he is the son of my house's gardener.....he already has an attribute and I entered together with him yesterday」

「Attribute.....wait, is that true?」

「Yes」

「The gardener's son.....so that means」

「Of course, he is a commoner」

Keeping commoners away would also mean keeping Keito away.

「My childhood friend is an indispensable existence for me, he is the person I rely on the most, and I take pride in our trust between each other. So if I were to keep away from you because your a “commoner”, it would also mean losing my precious childhood friend at the same time」

This sort of thing cannot even be joked about.

When comparing the evaluations of a complete stranger and Keito, even without thinking about it Keito is much more important.

「That's why I don't want to use my status as a wall. Of course, regardless of status, if Erumeru just doesn't like me, then there is no helping it.....」

I've spoken rather selfishly, if she comes to dislike me then it's just my loss. I wasn't trying to be mean or anything.....but this is just how I personally felt.

But if she still thought that “status” act as a wall between interactions.

「Nobles keeping away commoners, and commoners keeping away from nobles, in the end aren't those two essentially the same thing?」

Because nobles try to distance themselves from commoners, in return the commoners also try to stay away from nobles.

When looking at it from an objective standpoint it becomes hard to tell which is which, as both sides are doing the same to the other.

Since I'm aware of the slight differences in overall meaning.

I am completely fine with accepting her.

But after that the ultimate decision lies with Erumeru.

It would be bad if Primera were to also suddenly distance herself as a result so it's actually quite scary.....making friends is rather thrilling, there's no mistake in that.

「I will eat by myself for today, there might be various feelings of confusion or anger.....but, please remember that I only want to become friends with the two of you」

After saying that I stood up.

I've already ordered something for lunch, so I will not be able to leave the dining hall, but if I sit

somewhere far away from here it shouldn't be a problem. The dining hall is very large after all. I felt many gazes following me when I moved away but I continued forth ignoring them.

So this is what Erumeru was talking about.....

In the end, I didn't speak with them even after lunch, and so my second day after enrollment was over.

Chapter 51: Naive and Cute Friends

On the morning of the next day, when I normally went to school, neither Erumeru nor Primera had arrived yet.

I was relieved, but only because the tense moment was put off for now.....

I don't regret what I did yesterday, but I'm slightly reflective. In terms of location rather than content. I ended up remembering later that we were in the dining hall. But I already attracted quite the public eye. Even though there are already rumors about me!

I have a bad habit of disregarding my surroundings sometimes. Thus I'm reflecting.....

「Gokigen'yo, Mariabell-sama」

「G-Gokigen'yo, Primera-sama.....and Erumeru-sama also」

「.....Good morning」

They're here.....! It's natural since we're in the same class, but I wanted to have more time to mentally prepare.

No, even so I suppose there's nothing I can do about it.

For the time being I will not say anything, I have no choice but to remain silent. I already said everything I wanted to say yesterday, regardless of whether it is good or bad, judgment will be entirely left to oneself.

「Should we go to the back garden for today?」

「..... Yes? 」

Eh, for what? The subject is important, is what Keito usually tells me but it's actually quite true. Despite my confusion Primera continued smiling happily.....someone explain please.

「Primera, you have to explain properly」

「Eh?」

She had a blank look even though Erumeru pointed it out.

Primera is likely just a natural airhead. Un, I was thinking if that was the case it's alright.....it's quite cute and nice.

「Let's eat lunch in the back garden for today.....I made lunch boxes for you too」

「Eh.....」

This time I had a blank look on my face.

I wasn't expecting this development.....Erumeru had a stiff expression but Primera was smiling, so it didn't seem to be heading in a bad direction.

But I'm sorry, I can't really follow.

「Etto.....」

What should I do.....what is the correct answer for this sort of situation?

Interpersonal skills are too difficult for the lower class me!

「……Anyhow, what are your lunch plans for today?」

「I have none」

「Then……let's eat together」

It seems she noticed that I was troubled on how to answer, so she simplified the question.

Now there are only two choices “yes” or “no”, which the latter I couldn't really choose since I already said I had no plans.

Either way, my choice has already been decided since the beginning.

「Of course, gladly」

I wonder if this could be said as everything working out as desired?

Or just everything working out conveniently.

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After that the lessons hardly entered my head.

I just enrolled so it's still fine……except saying this carelessly will greatly affect my future academic progress, it's a school-type manga flag after all.

Un, I will do my best starting tomorrow. I'll be troubled if my grades fall.

「Primera go ahead and find a good spot, we will take some time since we're carrying the lunch boxes」

「Alright……in that case Mariabell-sama, I will be going ahead then」

After Erumeru said that, seemingly convincing Primera she then left holding only the picnic blanket and a bag of drinks.

Yes, I am now alone with Erumeru. It's too quick for me to prepare my heart.

I think she purposely made Primera go ahead like this. The back garden was very large and aside from that there are very few people there so there was no need to look for a good spot.

Either Primera wasn't unaware or Erumeru already notify her beforehand……from the exchange earlier this morning it was likely the former.

「Well then, hold this」

「Alright, understood」

She handed over a country-style basket to me. Since Erumeru also had the same one, it seems they split the three servings of lunch into two.

It's quite large for three people……did they perhaps eat a lot? Because we didn't eat together yesterday I don't really know how much they ate.

「……Yesterday」

「Eh?」

I was distracted quite thoroughly by the basket. I am hungry since I just finished class……because we were silent ever since we started walking, I also wanted to be conscious of other things.

「I thought about what happened yesterday afterwards, and Primera also spoke about it」

「Primera.....?」

「I realized that I was trying to put distance between us. Even though I am her childhood friend.....I couldn't look past our social status difference」

「.....You are also important for Primera, just like she is to you」

Because she's important she didn't want to separate, because she's important she thought it was better to be separate.

Both of them cherish each other greatly and I think both are correct in the end. There isn't anything gained by debating which feelings were right or wrong, there isn't any point in saying an "unrelated person" was wrong.

Although I can sympathize, there is only one method I would choose.

「Primera also said the same thing」

Erumeru suddenly started laughing.

Her smile.....this was the first time I saw it. It might've been a bitter laugh since I was thinking the same thing, but it still felt relieved.

Her expressions were dark but she's cute when she laughs, she had quite the lively impression as she greatly laughed out loud.

「That's why.....I am convinced of what you said. Regardless of the nobility aspect, I have a favorable impression towards you」

Hm.....somehow she seems to like me?

「But whether or not I want to be your friend.....to be honest I don't know yet」

Un, that was expected.

I had spoken rather selfishly, but my remark had increased her favorability towards me.

In the case of words, it is possible to say whatever you want.

The words of nobles especially have great impact as there are many people who will react to them, so even children are quite influential.

For commoners, it's suicidal to judge nobles by their 'words' alone. Or if the person is just plain stupid. After the past five rounds, that area is so painful that it's scarring. Betrayal schemes, along with experiencing false charges as well, to be honest I think it's more severe than the commoners who at least live in peace here. It was a matter of life or death, in reality I actually even died.

「That's why, I will decide by myself from now on. I will talk with you and then decide whether I like you or not. You don't have any problems with that right?」

The words of Erumeru were very cute but naive.

In reality she should be wary of saying such things to a noble as they might become angry, but for me if the opponent was a noble even if I couldn't retaliate I could still cut off involvement with them.

In fact, I actually did do that to Tuvalu. I retaliated with all my might and even left a final blow. And now I'm currently struggling to sever ties from an engagement.

When I thought about that, Erumeru is still rather naive. Her original personality seems to be obedient and direct, so she probably isn't use to disliking people without talking properly with them first. I think it's really naive. It's really naive but I also feel the same way. Avoiding obstacles aside, I did wish we could become friends.

「Yes, of course!」

We began laughing together and headed out just a bit earlier. Primera was waiting for us, and above all I wanted to eat lunch happily together with everyone. Although it's still only a temporary friendship, my heart felt more cheerful than I had expected.

Chapter 52: Proclamations of Youth

Two weeks have passed since my enrollment.

My relation with Primera and Erumeru hasn't particularly changed, we ate lunch together, spent our free time together.....for one, I do think we are interacting as friends.

Although there are still many things we don't know yet about each other, we've become well-acquainted over the past two weeks. But as of now the words "we are friends" is still but a dream.

Even so, knowing me and knowing them, it's possible we will truly become friends in the future. I was satisfied and felt comfortably at ease.

Above all it was generally peaceful. There are a few things that I should be slightly worried about but none that were too big of a deal.

And today there is an event being held for new students, so I'd like to focus on that.

「Has Maria-chan already decided?」

「No, I am still thinking about it.....but you two have already decided right?」

「I am joining the handicraft club」

「I am joining track」

「I see.....hmm, what should I do?」

I think that it can be guessed from the contents of our conversation, but club tours start today. There are some people who've already decided to enter a club before visiting since there's a list of clubs in the school pamphlet.

Primera and Eru seems to be among that group.....ah, Eru is Erumeru. Changing the way you refer to someone is the first step in becoming friends, I dropped the -sama part for Primera and began using Erumeru's nickname. Of course the two have also began referring to me as Maria.

And the story diverted. Anyways, the time to choose clubs starts from today.

To be honest.....there were no club activities that caught my interest. And my practice wand was slowly gathering dust.

In this school, or rather in this world club activities are a bit special.

First of all, there is no competition against schools. All the students of the same generation go to this school so it's normal.

There aren't any "school competitions" but there are various kinds of big and small competitions that vary by country.....but I am not really knowledgeable in that area.

Because Mariabell didn't actually join any clubs. Depending on the capture target she may perhaps participate in club activities, since she would join to run interference I could understand some of the process.....but I also didn't really pay attention because I was uninterested in sports to begin with.

「Why don't you visit the clubs and see if there are any you're interested in joining? We won't be able to go with you since we have to participate in the entrance meeting.....」

「Yes, I plan to do so. Thank you, I'm fine with going alone」

Let's explore around a bit after school. There wasn't really any club I wanted to join or was interested in, but it's still better than joining none.

I want to eliminate as many common points as possible with the game's Mariabell!

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Classes end and it's now after school.

With the pamphlet I received during my entrance in one hand, I decided to look into the clubs that interested me for now.

I tried to invite Keito thinking he might've wanted to come with me, but I was refused.

「I'm joining the gardening club」

「Eh, you've already decided?」

「I don't have any other interests and I want to study as well」

In reality Keito is currently suppose to be training to become a gardener, but due to a twist of fate he ended up as a rare transfer student of a magic academy.

Although his path diverted greatly, his future as a gardener will likely remain unchanged if you ask me. It's due to his family but he also has an interest in gardening himself.

「Well then, I will visit when...」

「Okay, the gardening club is in the back garden」

「I understand, I will go visit whenever I have time」

In other words, I started club visits by myself.

Chapter 53: Pleasantries with an Ikemen!

First off all sports club are out.

My athletic skills aren't bad.....I think. Mariabell is a villainess so she is quite high spec in everything other than her personality. She wasn't the genius type but rather the type "that gets better the more she tried" but she would drop out of everything due to sheer laziness. But since she's initially high spec to begin with her athletic skills aren't bad either, above all her speed at escaping in the ending was faster than anyone else.

But the reason I don't want to join any sports club isn't because I'm "bad" at sports but rather because I don't "like" sports.

Although it's club activities of a rich school, I would still have a bad experience if I joined with little interest. That's just how athletic clubs are.

Thus, as expected it's the cultural clubs. If possible I would like to have a pleasant oujo-sama paradise.

「.....This is quite the cultural department」

Although this would be expected of a magic academy.

Starting with Magic research, the Magic History club, the None-Attribute Magic Experimental club.....and there will be even more in the high school division since there will also be different attributes.

I like magic but.....I am not interested in research. Besides, I already know what attribute I am. But it's better to hide that info instead of revealing it.

Otherwise exaggerated rumors like "I discovered my own attribute" will start spreading. Let's avoid troublesome things!

「Handicrafts club.....I wouldn't mind joining」

Primeria is there and it also seems fun.

However, I am not good with handicrafts and to be honest I'm more interested in the finished product instead of the actual process.

I'm confident in my skills against any ordinary noble daughters but not against noble daughters who have actual interest in handicrafts. Although my mother also had some interest in handicrafts it was still a rich person hobby, since the amount of time and money put forth was different it's on a whole new level.

「.....I don't really feel like joining anything」

Of course there are clubs that a beginner could join with no problems but in the first place I wasn't interested in anything to begin with.

Because it's the time where people are visiting clubs, there are many recruitment posters on the bulletin board.

There's also strange ones mixed in with the normal ones.....what is this Cataliareus Theater Appreciation Club?

I'm assuming Cataliareus is a person's name or something, but it's not necessarily limited to that. Is it not just a Theatre Appreciation club?

There were some people that just appreciate the art of it and then there is the actual “Theatre Club” that actually does it. There were also advertising posters alongside it, a beautiful person with short moss-green hair was smiling on it.

「Starring Cataliareus Burnieahh, this person」

Apparently it seems the mentioned Cataliareus is this person.

Seriously.....is this person perhaps really good?

“Cataliareus Theater Appreciation Club” is probably a club dedicated to appreciating the plays this person is in. I’m starting to get interested.....no, rather I am interested.

Cataliareus..-san.

I want to go take a small look.

The smiling Cataliareus-san shown in the posters looked very beautiful, the gender neutrality appearance was attractive.

The appearance was different than the heroine and me.....Oresseine-san is the closest. The difficulty in judging gender was exactly the same.

「Are you interested in the Theater Club?」

「No, I’m just looking.....」

A voice came from behind, I immediately turned around and moved away from the front of the bulletin board.

I was in the way since I was standing in the middle of the bulletin board.....or that’s what I thought.

「That’s a shame, cute new members are always welcomed after all」

Looking forward and looking backward, the faces are the same. Ah, each was very beautiful.

One is flat, the other one is three-dimensional. Of course the one that called out to me is three-dimensional.

I’m quite surprised that the actual person just appeared right in front of me.

「Cataliareus..-san?」

「Nice to meet you, I’m Cataliareus Burnie, a third year」

A handsome face and gentle looking eyes.

Moss green hair and greenish-yellow eyes along with well-defined facial features. The type where you could both see the appearance of a boy and girl from the face.

The height was also very tall but.....she seems to be female because she was wearing a skirt. Unless Cataliareus-san had a hobby of dressing up as a girl.

She was wearing a black knee-length skirt along with a white shirt which I felt emphasized her gender neutral appearance. I suppose she is someone who knows her own traits well, she looked very nice.

「Are you a new student?」

「Ah.....excuse me, I am Mariabell Tempest, a first year」

「You mean the rumored.....?」

「Rumors.....is it」

I had a bad feeling when that phrase came out.

「Prince Runa's fiancée——」

「No, your wrong」

As expected it was that.....!

I instinctively denied rather sharply, even though the other party was my senior.....I will reflect on it but I don't regret it.

I don't know what will happen if I don't properly deny it, I could only imagine a horrible future. Rumors and misunderstandings are guaranteed in a shoujo manga, it's best to remain composed and clearly deny those sorts of issues, act embarrassed and annoying misunderstandings may arise.

「I was nominated as a candidate before but I am not anymore」

「Is that right? The prince is so wasteful to cancel an engagement with such a cute child like yourself」

She smiled softly and gave off a rather prince-like impression herself. I thought that I could even see light shining from behind her.

Since she isn't a capture target I can actually admire her. She was really cool.

「Have you already decided which club you want to join?」

「No, not yet.....there are so many clubs so I was a bit lost」

「There isn't any specific number required for a club so even one member could register a club . Because there are also many clubs that are barely active, it would be smart to make effective use of the club trial periods」

「Is that so.....」

I'll keep this valuable advice in mind.

However I might be overwhelmed if I try out too many clubs.

I still have some time, so let's think it over.....

「Anyhow, I apologize for holding you up, I hope you find a club you like」

「Likewise, thank you for your valuable advice」

「You're welcome」

Even the image of her leaving with one hand raised up in farewell was very nice.....I know she's female but I still want to call her an ikemen. I could now slightly understand the feelings of people who are addicted to Takarazuka.

In the end I didn't visit any clubs for today and just finished gathering info on what kind of clubs there are.

Chapter 54: It's Rather Unusual For the New Character to Come Along

I went to class and continued my club visits after school.

After repeating this cycle a few times, I ended up noticing something.

I really don't have any interests.

I thought that I was interested in gardening, but as expected it's due to Keito's influence so I don't think I could do it alone.

I would feel sorry for the gardening club if I entered with such an attitude. Besides it would also be rude to Keito.

Thus.....my options are starting to run out.

「Are you still hesitating?」

「I want to join one.....」

「You're not really being forced to so isn't it fine if you don't join?」

Un, that is true.

But even though I said I wanted to eliminate as many common points with the game, I also wanted to experience the feeling of joining a club.....in that case I should really hurry up and decide already.

「What? Maria-san is hesitant about which club to join!?!」

「.....Sashia-sama, gokigen'yo」

Sashia has appeared.

I tried my best to minimize interactions, but as expected the person sitting next to me is strong. Due to daily group activities the amount of mandatory interactions increased, by the time I noticed he was calling me Maria-san.....even though I firmly persist in calling him Sashia!

「Sasha, don't just suddenly jump into the conversation, it surprised me」

「Sorry, sorry, since I'm sitting next to you all I ended up overhearing」

As expected, he's popular. He's already friends with mostly everyone in class, of course Eru and Primera are among them.

I hope I'm not counted as one of them, at the very least just view me as a classmate.

「Has Sasha-kun already decided on which club to join?」

「Yes, I'm joining the soccer club」

Un, it was the same in the high school division. Mariabell even went to cheer him on many times.

Although she didn't really contribute much besides making squealing noises. Ah, but the club budget did increase.

「More than that, Maria-san! If you are in doubt, how about joining the soccer club!?!」

「.....I am a girl」

The soccer club of this school is supposedly male only.
What? Does this boy mean I look like a male?

「I know! I don't mean as a player, but I was wondering if you would join as a manager」

「Ah, you mean that」

Manager.....a position many girls would yearn for. If this were your typical cliché shoujo manga the love interest would be the ace player.

But even if it's a soccer club full of ikemen, there would still be many work to do and the other party even expressly offered an invitation.

Besides, if you ask me I don't think a noble's daughter would fit the role of manager.

A pampered daughter of nobility would be unlikely able to do many chores.

「.....I don't think I will be suitable for the position」

Aside from that I don't have a good premonition from being in the same club as Sashia.

「Ah, the work is just keeping score and check of equipment so it should be simple I think? You won't have to do any cleaning or the likes」

Then is there really any need for a manager?

「You'll also be talking to the student council regarding the club budget」

.....Anyhow, it's still a manager all the same, it's not the "helping with club activities" type of manager but rather "the showbiz management" type of manager instead I believe? Considering that it might possibly be a reasonable line of work for both commoners and noble daughters.

Aside from that I wouldn't have to play the sport. But the duties of manager remain unchanged.

I sometimes forget it, but this is a magic academy. All club activities are conducted with wands. Of course, the practice wands have limiter magic placed on them so there is no danger.....especially with sports club there are many stray shots during the games.

In one of the acts during the Sashia route, Mariabell began to harass the heroine who also came to cheer for Sashia, but then a really powerful stray shot came flying over the protective fence.

It was awfully scary. Since it was the high school division attributes had already been decided and fireballs were flying around.

For a moment, I thought this was how I would die in the Sashia route.

If I become a manager wouldn't I be over the fence? There is no reason to deal with such terrors.

「I'm sorry, but sports club.....」

It would be difficult to outright deny him, so I tried deceiving him. Because my reason for not joining the club would be because he is a capture target. I am scared of stray magic spells, would also not work since it would be rejected as soon as he says "it'll be fine" even though there wouldn't be any basis for that.

So I wanted to change the topic.....but as soon as I thought that, I saw a figure approaching us.

「Sasha, I'm sorry for interrupting but do you mind if I have a word?」

Nice timing! Very nice! Please take the nuisance!

「Mariabell-sama has a visitor」

「Eh.....me?」

Not Sashia? She had spoken to Sashia first even though she had business with me, you can easily measure the difference in popularity between him and me!

I'm still only in middle school, but my villainess face is steadily reaching completion.....although I suppose for a girl their growth period would be during middle school.

「The person is waiting at the staircase」

「I understand, thank you」

I said thank you and even smiled but she began bowing her head and immediately retreated backwards. Although we were in the same grade she was being very formal so there is a considerable distance. However when she suddenly pulled away from me it felt like the distance between us was even further. I'm not trying to befriend everyone in the class! Those are my thoughts.....but at the very least I want to be considered a classmate.

Well I'll think about it next time. I can also consult Primera and Eru about it.

「Sashia-sama, I apologize but.....」

「Un, go on ahead!」

「I will not be back until class ー」

「No worries!」

「Understood, I will be going then」

Sashia, Primera, and Eru waved as I left the classroom.

The area at the staircase is literally a landing spot. Normally one would wait at the door, but in the case of upperclassmen or anyone not from the same grade they would gather quite the public attention. Once when Keito came to visit me in class I also moved to the landing spot since he stood out.

Was it Keito? But my classmates know about Keito, so why would he be referred to as a “visitor”.....? As I was questioning this while walking through the long corridor, I found my answer when I saw a person smiling while waving to me at the staircase landing spot.

「Maria-chan! Sorry for calling you out like this」

「Cataliareus-sama?」

As usual her smile was dazzlingly and very cool.....but also something seemed out of place. I was expecting Keito so I was a bit surprised.

Cataliareus Burnie-sama, a beautiful upperclassmen worthy of being called an ikemen and in my eyes a better ikemen than the capture targets.

After meeting her by chance on the first day of club tours in the hallway and later on in the dining hall, before I knew it she started calling me Maria-chan.

She wasn't a capture target or a person related to them, she was someone I had no prior knowledge about from the game. So I didn't really have any other choice but to view her as a nice and beautiful upperclassmen.

「Catalia is fine, Cataliareus is too long right?」

「But you're a third year upperclassmen of mine」

「But that upperclassmen said it's fine, right?」

「……Yes, Catalia-sama」

There is a certain compelling force of a smile of an ikemen. Although Catalia-sama is a girl. But even so she was still very cute. It's rather sad to say this of myself, but Mariabell also has a rather cute face.

「Ano in that case……did you need something from me?」

「Ahh, sorry, the conversation diverted」

I thought that it was something urgent because she came all the way to my class, but with this atmosphere it seems not……?

Rather I wasn't expecting Catalia-sama to have any business with me.

「Maria-chan, have you already decided on a club?」

「No, I'm still deciding……」

Rather than saying I was still deciding, it feels no matter where I go there will be a dead end.

「So there isn't any club you want to join?」

「Yes……in the end I couldn't decide upon which club to join」

In my case, I just want to “join” a club so it isn't strange that I haven't decided upon one yet. I was hoping with all the various sorts of clubs there would at least be one that would interest me but that sort of optimism has long been shattered.

I wonder if I'm destined to be in no club even though auto-mode has expired.

I was sighing in my mind, but on the contrary Catalia-sama smiled.

Before I could even question her behavior, Catalia-sama grabbed my hand and drew close to me, her face was very near mine. Her face was very beautiful even at a close distance.

「In that case, how about joining the student council?」

「……What?」

Chapter 55: The Headmaster's Speech Made Me Sleepy

Eh, where did this suddenly come from?

We were just talking about clubs right? Why did she suddenly bring up student council? Above all I just enrolled, I'm a brand new first year you know? Even my uniform gives off a new impression.....though that really isn't due to grade level but rather wealth.

Anyhow, the top of the students the "student council" I don't really think I'm suitable for such a high level position. No, in the first place even if I did want to join the student council, it's not something I can just up and join.

「Catalia-sama, I don't really understand what.....」

「Ahh, sorry! That's right」

「No, ano, what did you mean by student council?」

「My friend is in the student council, but they are short on hands.....」

Currently the student council consists of the president, vice-president, two treasurers, and one secretary for a total of five people.

Although it seems small, it's usually sufficient since an executive committee is elected from each class grade for events. However, it seems originally there should be one more secretary.

「But aren't student council members usually decided by an election.....?」

「Election.....? No, the top nobles are selected for the positions every year?」

Could it be that there weren't any elections in this world.....!

But then again, if you think about it the positions of the king and nobles are also hereditary. So there really isn't any need for elections.

「But I'm still just a first-year who just enrolled. Instead of choosing me shouldn't the upperclassmen be chosen instead.....」

「Up to now, all the third years have been refusing the invitation to join for the past year, although even if I say that now it cannot be helped」

「I see」

If there was a person that wanted to join they would already essentially. Since there is no election it's just based on potential candidates, and if that wasn't enough then the student council members or teachers would just head out for solicitation themselves.

The student council seems troublesome. Mariabell is from the upper aristocracy but she was never invited before in the past rounds, as expected it must be because of her bad impression and personality.

「So then.....how about it? You don't have to decide right away but could you give it a try?」

「Is it really alright to join the student council so halfheartedly?」

Going from experience.....the student council is the representative of all students right? It would be bad to go about it like this.

It's difficult to refuse her since her eyes are full of expectations.....and since I'm originally bad at refusing to begin with.

「Etto.....」

「For now please just give it a try.....or is it really no good?」

Is it really possible to win against a dejected beautiful face?

At the very least, I can't!

「.....If it's just a try then」

「Really!? Thank you Maria-chan~!!」

Where did her previous dejected expression go? A cheerful looking Catalia-sama grabbed my hands while smiling.

Her change was quite fast, though I was expecting it. Even though I knew it would turn out like this I still ended up being deceived. Catalia-sama the prince of the theater club, a normal person like me can't see through her I suppose.

One of my core mottoes "Resignation is fundamental".

「Sorry for taking up your time, I will pick you up after school」

「Catalia-sama will do so?」

「Yes, I will escort you since I'm the person who asked of this」

「But your club.....」

「The script for today isn't finished yet so it's self-training day」

Then essentially it would get in the way of her self-training.....ah, but in the first place it was Catalia-sama who invited me. Alright, I won't mind then.

「Well then, good luck with your class」

「Yes」

She was also beautiful when she walked away with a simple wave.

I heard a person's growth would influence their beauty, but for this case the facial features are the most prominent.

After seeing Catalia-sama off, when I returned to the classroom Eru was sitting in my seat as she was talking together with Primera and Sashia.

I was expecting Sashia to go somewhere else but.....when I think about it his seat is right next to mine.

「Welcome back~」

「Welcome back」

「I'm back」

「Who was it? Keito-san?」

「No, it was Catalia-sama」

It's strange hearing Keito's name from another person. Since I was older I didn't really use any honorifics, but then I remembered he was actually now older.

As Eru returned my seat to me, I sat back down and began preparing for the next class. What was next again, math?

「Catalia-sama.....so that means Maria-chan is joining the theater club?」

「I was invited to join the student council not theater club」

「Student council.....?」

I could understand the feelings of the two who tilted their heads in confusion to what I said. After all why would an upperclassmen from the theater club be inviting me to join the student council.

Catalia-sama is famous even among the first-years so it was perhaps difficult to grasp just how the two were related. They were even surprised when they heard that I was acquainted with Catalia-sama.

「It seems that the student council is lacking in members, and Catalia-sama's friend is one of the members」

「Ahh, that's why.....it's true that this year would be quite difficult」

「Eh.....?」

Eh, I didn't hear anything about this. Catalia-sama also didn't say anything!?

「Prince Runa is the student council president this year, so it seems even the other members will be troubled in various ways」

「.....Eh? 」

A sudden bomb was dropped.

Eh? Eru who did you just was the student council president?

「Prince Runa is still only a second-year.....」

「Royal family members are made vice-president in their first year, and president in their second year though?」

Eh, is that right? Apparently it seems to be common knowledge but I didn't know of this. What kind of royal amendment is that? It's rather troubling so please abolish it immediately right now. If you're advocating for equality between nobles and commoners please follow through with it! It was lovely since parents couldn't appeal for more favoritism! Making exceptions just because the person is royalty instead of nobility, what a joke!

Rather even if Catalia-sama asked of me I refuse.....!

「He even gave a greeting during the entrance ceremony」

「.....Is that right」

It seems to be my own fault for not remembering.

I was distracted by Sashia after all.....and the entrance ceremony speech was so boring that I didn't pay attention.

After school.....what do I do?

Chapter 56: Any Appearance Can be Different

Usually I would wish for it to be after school as soon as possible, but today it's the opposite. Please let it never be after school. I already lost track of how many times I tried praying for that.

Of course it didn't come true and soon it was after school. I also felt that it was even quicker than usual.

It seems god dislikes me.

I never said anything about not believing.

「Well then, we will be going to our clubs」

「Bye-bye」

「Alright, see you tomorrow」

As the two headed off to their clubs, I was waiting for Catalia-sama while suppressing the urge to return home by all means.

I really want to go back, but I couldn't break a promise with my senior. Because I am a chicken.

During the few minutes where I spent my time in anxiety, people around me began heading off to their clubs or back home. A knock then sounded on the door closest to the staircase.

「Maria-chan, thanks for waiting」

The image of her lightly leaning on the door was very cool. I suppose I might join the appreciation club, I would like to see this person perform.

「Ready to go?」

「Yes, I'm ready」

Although my heart is anything but prepared. The excessive pressure on the heart is dreadful, it's pounding quite rapidly. Since I'm meeting a prince my mental reaction isn't really wrong, but I think it's closer to an exorcist's anxiety when confronting a demon alone. Although I have never met a demon before.

「The student council room is on the top floor of the school building」

This school can roughly be divided into four buildings.

A classroom building where our classes are held. A special building for the music room, art room, magic laboratory, and the likes. A club building for club activities. And on the top floor of the school building where the staff room and headmaster's room are located, the faculty building. Even though the buildings weren't separately built I don't have any problems with calling them "buildings" since the entire school building was far too large. Just the club "building" alone is already properly a building.

And the top floor of the school building is like a castle itself.....it's a suitable place for a prince to reign from. I suppose it isn't a place for a lowly human like myself to be at!

If you want me to spell it out clearly, I don't want to go at all.

Although it felt like an eternity time still flowed by quickly. Even Keito's classroom which was closer to the student council room felt very far off but soon I arrived in front of the student council room.

「Are you nervous?」

「No, ano.....just a bit」

It's a lie. I am very nervous.

But I couldn't say it's not because of the student council but because of Prince Runa.

「It's alright, my friend's face might look scary but he's actually nice」

Now that she mentioned it, there are five people in total.....I was too preoccupied with Prince Runa that I forgot.

Since the prince became president this year they've been more selective about the status and origin of the other members according to Eru and the rest. Every year it seems either nobles from the upper aristocracy or royalty from other countries would be selected so I wouldn't mind if they continued doing so.

「Julius~, are you there~?」

These words came out as she knocked on the door were definitely that of a friend.

Shouldn't the student council room be a more intimidating place? The student council president is the representative of all students, and the other members also have powers within their own rights over everyone else correct? Although since I've never been here I can't really say for sure.

But at the very least it shouldn't be a place giving off the impression of "coming to visit a friend's house".

「Catalia.....at least try to act more accordingly」

In response to Catalia's voice, the door opened from inside.

A person with long dark red hair, the color of bordeaux, that went down to the neckline came out. The eyes were wine-red, and the glare was quite impressive as it formed wrinkles between the eyebrows. The voice was also low and quite scary.

Above all, is this person really middle school student? Isn't the height too tall?

Catalia-sama is a girl so I don't have any particular doubts even though she is a bit tall for her age, but you are a male right? Should he be going through puberty already?

「Normally there are others besides me」

「But now there isn't right? Don't worry, I'm keeping that part in mind」

「If you really were thinking abo.....」

Hm, somehow.....he's not as scary as I thought.

He looks somehow like Keito whenever I get too caught up with my words and actions.

「.....And that first year is?」

Ah, he looked over here. If you look carefully, there is a trace like a cut on the right eyebrow.

An intimidating face along with a scar, he looks just like the classic template of a delinquent. Although he isn't scary since I saw his demeanor when talking with Catalia-sama.

「A child I recruited, I was sad because people wouldn't join, how is she?」

「I am Mariabell Tempest」

「I'm Julius Davanhia, a third year, I am the current vice-president」

How.....is this third year the vice-president, it feels out of place for this delinquent template-san to be the vice-president.

Do I realize I'm being rude towards my upperclassmen? But.....Un, the gap is far too big.

Catalia-sama raised an amused voice in response to my stiff reaction when I saw Julius' face.

「Julius, your face is scary, Maria-chan is petrified it seems~」

「Eh, n-.....」

「This is my natural look, leave me alone」

「It's not just his face but he also doesn't have any sort of humor. sorry, Maria-chan」

「No, I don't really think.....Julius-sama is that scary」

As far as facial features are concerned, my classmates are also scared of me so it's not like I have any right to talk, I'm also accustomed to unsociable people due to Keito. Besides, I have already confronted an indomitably terrifying person. Nothing is more terrifying than the smile of a yandere.

Now that I think about it, I'm afraid of Tuvalu as much as I am of the death flag.....I'm not good with Sashia or Runa but at least I'm not afraid of them.

「.....」

「.....」

「.....Eh? Ano, what's wrong?」

I was too preoccupied with my thoughts again. It's a bad habit of mine, I start thinking about something and end up disregarding my surroundings.

When I came back to my senses, it seems that Julius-sama had widened his eyes in surprise. Although Catalia-sama was smiling like usual, she appeared happier than before.

It's a bit scary with those two staring at me like that. I thought I wasn't scared a moment ago but now I want to retreat.

「.....Both of you enter, talking while standing is annoying」

「Eh.....ano」

I was invited inside as if nothing had happened, but.....in the end what was with their previous expressions.

Without answering my question, Julius-sama turned around and went inside the room.

Julius-sama had completely opened the doors after going inside, since there wasn't a door clasp the doors began to close, but just before it could fully close Catalia-sama held it open and beckoned me to enter.

「Don't worry about it, he is shy around others. here, come in!」

「T-thank you very much」

Shy.....I know it's rude to think that it doesn't suit his face, but like I said the gap is far too great. I thought I knew not to judge a person by their looks since it also applied to myself but.....Un, I also still have a long way to go. One should view a person with a discerning eye. While slightly reflecting upon myself in my mind, I went through the door into the student council room.

Chapter 57: Merciless Three Hour Course

The door to the room was very gorgeous and luxurious.

There were bookshelves lined up to my left and right, while the front side had a single window letting in a bright and spacious atmosphere. The desk, chair, and each piece of furniture to even the carpet in the room gave off an illusion as if this room were a room inside a mansion.

No, it's not a mistake because it's a room inside a castle-like building but.....in the first place this is a school. It's a rich school, and the classrooms and other facilities are all very gorgeous, so the tolerance range should be quite large yet I still can't help but comment on it.

First of all, isn't the room design rather strange? Even including me there should only be six people using this room right?

But somehow it's about the size of half a classroom enough to fit around 25 people. Half a classroom might not sound like that big a deal, but when you think about the difference between the actual number of people using this room it's rather strange. And the classrooms are also abnormally large to begin with.

Even the furniture is very high-class, think about the use of money.

「Coffee or black tea, which?」

「I would like black tea」

「I'll have the same thing」

I would assume usually there is only coffee or black tea. No, in a regular student council room, there shouldn't be tea leaves or utensils occupying an entire shelf. It would normally be the instant kind, although personally water is also fine.

「So one coffee and two black teas then」

Ah, so Julius-sama prefers coffee. Well, I guess there really wasn't any need to copy Catalia-sama..... ahh but I can't really drink coffee anyways.

Julius-sama then rang a small golden bell and a white-haired man dressed in butler clothing immediately entered from the door. He appears youthful for an old man but his age is probably old enough to be considered a grandpa. So in other words, an elderly gentleman. And one of the waiters in the academy.

Since a waiter appeared it seems that Julius-sama will not be the one preparing the drinks, it seems I've also become considerably spoiled. Although I can't really resist since it's a normal occurrence at this point.

We sat down in the reception area, after the waiter finished preparing the drinks and left the room, Julius-sama began explaining about the student council.

「Student council work is mostly just paperwork, so office work. Especially with new secretaries the work is usually always paperwork.....thus you will not be really busy under any circumstances but you also won't have much free time」

In particular since the prince became the president this year it seems it'll be busier than usual in regards to reception. Because of that the other member's workload will also increase due to the increase in reception for the prince.

Furthermore, since the status of the other members are also either related to the royal family or the upper aristocracy in accordance with the prince, there is a high possibility that aside from the prince even the other members will have to deal with receptions.

Why make such a troublesome person president.....making successive royal family members president, shouldn't they have learned since Soleil would've been one recently.

「There isn't any problems regarding your status since your the daughter of the Tempest house, it'll actually even be helpful if you entered.....but for now let's just wait for the others to arrive first」

「Speaking of which there are also four people from last year and another new person entering right?」

「Yes, a first year boy, you might be acquainted with him already since he's from Class C」

「Eh.....」

A person from the same class joining the student council.....I wonder who it could be.

I don't have any knowledge about events occurring during middle school, so if possible I would prefer someone who isn't involved with the story.

「Well, I'll introduce you anyways, they should be arriving soon.....」

As if right on cue. There was a sound of the door opening slightly and I turned my eyes towards it.

At that moment, my memory lapsed.

It was a person who could clear the strict status restrictions that were implemented when the prince became president, the person was also very talented so it wouldn't even be strange if he did join the student council.

More than anything, if Prince Runa enters the student council that person wouldn't be able to be together with him anymore.

And for me, an existence that I am most wary of.

When I returned to myself, I saw a beautiful light blue hair color next to a silver hair color.

Chapter 58: A Light Blue Color is not Necessarily Gentle to the Eyes

「So you two are already acquainted with the Tempest's daughter」

「Yes, we have met several times already」

「Somehow, it seems to be good fate」

「Ah, haha.....ha.....」

I wonder if there is a place in this world where I could sever all connections. At this point even if it's a suspicious looking fortune teller, someone please help me.

I've already stopped breathing.

「Then I'll just do a simple introduction, President Runa and Treasurer Tuvalu」

Now that I think about it if Runa is the president it's only natural for Tuvalu to also be in the student council. His severe "sickness" for his childhood friend has long developed.

Why couldn't I have realized that sooner.....!?

My crisis avoiding abilities appears to be awfully useless, but even so couldn't there have been a better crisis than this?

With the appearance of the student council members the outsider Catalia-sama left so my sole support would be the newly-acquainted Juilius-sama.

Aside from the two capture targets, I just met him today but for now I have a good impression of him, compared to the typical mysterious person he's slightly more on the positive side.

I am also still an outsider! But I don't really have the courage to actually say that.

「And the two of them are the other treasurer and secretary」

Without noticing the conflict in my heart, Julius-sama pointed to a person with brown hair wearing glasses and a person with black hair who had fox-like eyes. Judging from the color of their school badge the brown hair one appears to be a second year and the black hair one a first year.

「I'm Seeka Neil, we're from the same class but this is the first time I spoke to you」

Speaking of Julius-sama did mention something like this a while ago. The shock of light blue was too strong so it was sent flying from my memories.

But.....even though we've been in the same class for around a month now the name didn't ring a single bell. I am very sorry.

It's familiar for me, but this should be the first time I saw black hair in this world.....yet it didn't leave a single impression. Even though I am devoting my utmost to stay vigilant of Sashia, as expected it'll be a problem to let this narrowness of my field of vision to continue on any longer. Anyhow, I really am sorry.

「I'm sorry, my memories are rather bad」

「No, I'm not really the prominent type either」

Is this that? Is he essentially implying that I stand out?

Although he's a bit plain his facial features are nice.....at least much better than that light blue that entered my sight earlier.

To be honest, that mask-like smile I'm seeing from the corner of my eyes is rather scary. It made me recall of a certain mask with crescent moon shapes for its eyes and mouth.

「And this is Thomas, a second year. He's currently the only secretary」

「Thomas Crowe, pleased to meet you」

Julius-sama introduced the last one and Tuvalu finally disappeared from my line of sight when I turned to face him. It's scary that he's watching from where I can't see him.....but at the very least I get to erase him from my thoughts for a bit.

Thomas-sama, I suppose he seems normal but in a good way.

Not only are his facial features well-balanced but even his body. He's likely the type where when you first meet him the only impression would be "wears glasses", so essentially the type without any distinctive or noticeable elements.

For me it's rather nice and gentle on the eyes. Because he's different from all the conspicuous ikemen thus far.

「I am Mariabell Tempest, I look forward to working with you from today」

「Miss Tempest might be joining as a secretary, so I'll leave her to you, Thomas」

「Understood, if it means decreasing my workload I'll fully cooperate」

「Since she hasn't decided whether to officially join yet, be careful regarding the management of information」

Even if it's the student council should students still be allowed to handle matters like confidential information.....but then again, since the student council is essentially managing and allocating expenses it does make sense that they would naturally be involved in other affairs.

After Julius-sama's words everyone headed to their own seats and began working. I was sitting beside Thomas and the other first year Seeka was being taught next to Tuvalu.

If there had been a lack of treasurers I would be the one next to Tuvalu being taught, but since Seeka took that position for the time being I felt relieved to be a secretary.

But thinking carefully, if I did enter the Student Council I would basically be meeting Tuvalu face to face everyday. Imaging the horrific future outcomes, I began worrying about how I would go about declining the invitation to join.

No, seriously what should I do.....

Chapter 59: A Villainess Leaning Towards No

「The job of the secretary is to keep records. Along with that we also have to make flyers and guidebooks for events, if there are meetings we will also have to record the proceedings」

During the training session, I couldn't really stay vigilant towards Tuvalu and Runa. I will not be entering anyways to begin with.....no, I'm going to push towards not entering with all my might, but I still have to pay attention for today.

It's rude towards Thomas-sama who is giving me explanations, so if possible I should try to avoid thinking about other things.

「Most are handwritten, but we can use a typewriter if it gets too difficult or if there's too many. Have you used a typewriter before?」

「No, never.....but I know how to use it」

Typewriter.....I've seen father and Oresseine-san using one before, but I have never used one myself. I don't write as much to where I would need to use a typewriter.

As to why I know how to use one even so, it's because of the knowledge I accumulated from the past five rounds. Even so I would never use it since there really wasn't any need to do so.

「Today I am just making copies of the other day's record of proceedings, so there isn't really much work. It might be boring.....but please sit on this chair and watch for now」

Thomas drew out a simple chair as he said that and urged me to sit down, Even though it's simple, there is a luxurious feeling, such as the shiny wooden texture and fluffy cushion. At the very least it's to the point where it's not suitable for a school's student council. Shouldn't we really just re-check over how the money is spent?

「Ah, if you want tea or anything just ring that bell and a waiter will come」

This is quite outrageous. It's like back home.

After that Thomas-sama immersed himself in his work and only the sound of typing could be heard. During the training process, my intentions to refuse joining began to rise. Disregarding the confidential words written on the paper outside as much as possible, I focused my attention on Thomas' hands, it's a leisure to say that there is nothing to do.

But that aside since my natural enemy is in the same space I have to remain vigilant. I don't know what will happen if I even reveal the slightest bit of weakness.....I feel like some sort of criminal on the inside. But with no intention to reform.

Ah, as for who is this natural enemy, I'm sure everyone knows correct?

It's that light blue haired yandere that's shrouded in darkness you know?

Julius-sama looks overwhelmingly scary if it's only the face.....but truly, people cannot be judged from their looks!

With these sorts of thoughts in mind during the training session.....one hour passed. It seems I was too conscious of the natural enemy, although it hasn't been that long I started feeling a dull pain like muscle soreness.

Due to my concentration it seems I became negligent in my surroundings and a big hand landed on my shoulder.

「Miss Tempest, you may return soon」

「Julius-sama」

「You've learned enough already, the job of the secretary is a simple task so we'll teach you more if you decide to join later on」

「Yes, understood」

Finally I can leave.....although it's only been an hour, I think I feel more tired from doing nothing but watching than I would've been from working. Mostly mentally though.

「You can think it over on whether you want to join or not.....but since the roster of the members will be made at the end of this month I'll ask you at that time」

Roster.....ah, like that. So a booklet will be made with pictures like the ones showing each successive headmasters.

At the end of the month.....so one month. That's enough time to think about an excuse to refuse the invitation.....since I haven't thought of one yet at the moment.

「Well, thanks for today. I will talk to Catalia.....so please refuse properly」

「Eh.....?」

The last words were spoken in a low voice so that the others couldn't hear, but I could hear it clearly since he was right in front of me.

Refuse.....no, I meant to refuse, but how did he find out!? Did it show on my face? But I only really didn't want to join after I realized that Tuvalu was also here.....!

Did I perhaps make a really disgusted expression at that moment? But if so, I think the person himself would've noticed. Although he was released as a yandere, for the time being I feel his character setting is more that of a "schemer".

My stomachaches are starting to returning after remembering that I started a fight against such a person.....

「.....Etto, I'll think about it」

In the end I was caught off-guard to the point where I recalled the exchanges between me and Tuvalu, so I was only able to reply in rather dry voice.

I'm not interested in whether Tuvalu's impression of me is bad or not, but I'd like to avoid being hated enough to the point where I end up raising a death flag unrelated to the heroine.

.....Although I feel it might be a bit too late.

Chapter 60: Reconfirmation

What should I do? How should I refuse?

It's not really bad if Tuvalu were to find out.....no, it shouldn't be a problem even if he did find out. Each person has their own preferences, even people who appear agreeable on the outside still have their own thoughts on the inside.

But the other party is Tuvalu, there is a possibility of being guided to the death flag even if it doesn't involve the heroine, rather imagining it is far too easy.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish for villainess capture target guide. Please give me a death flag avoidance manual!

「.....Maria」

Rather why do I even have to be scared of coming up with a refusal?

Would it be bad if I actually refused? It should be alright if I'm just busy or have a reasonable reason. Although I do feel a bit guilty towards Catalia-sama, to begin with she isn't even a member of the Student Council.

「Maria」

That's right, let's think about it. My thoughts became disordered after encountering Tuvalu, but if I think logically, this is an opportunity. Thomas-sama seems to be troubled by the lack of manpower, but Julius-sama doesn't expect me to enter so the hurdle is low.

Let's go at this calmly. I am too busy to figure out what I want to do. So I should instead try not to think as much. Especially since I'm originally not suitable for thinking.

「Maria!」

「Yes.....!?!」

「.....Any longer and you would've ran into it」

My name resounded through my ears and a hand grabbed onto my arm preventing me from walking any further.

I finally realized that I was one step away from running into the fountain so I was relieved. If I kept walking like this, I would've hit my knees against the edge made of stone, and worse case fallen straight into the fountain.

「Ah, thanks.....」

「Be careful, if you were to get hurt here we wouldn't be able to return to the dormitories right away」

「Yes, I'm sorry.....」

We are currently in "Oztown" a town located on the premises of the school. From everyday consumables to food, it is a versatile castle city with many miscellaneous goods and accessories.

It seems the facilities are all so perfect to prevent any inconveniences.....I don't think it's good to be too spoiled. Although I wouldn't voice any complaints due to the social status of the ongoing students. If they were to wonder around and end up being kidnapped it could become an international problem.

And due to the numerous stores there are also many kinds of assortments which is helpful, so I should actually be grateful not complain.

「So, have you decided on what to buy? 」

「Not at all, I have thought about it, but I don't really know what a guy would like」

「I suppose.....Greas-sensei is also an adult, so there is also an age difference aside from gender」

We are.....or rather I am here today for the purpose of finding a gift for Greas-sensei in thanks for the barrette I received as an entrance celebration.

Although it has already been about a month, I didn't have time to go shopping since I was busy adjusting to the school and dormitories.

In the end after quite a while.....today was a break day so there were no classes or clubs so I was able to get Keito involved, which should be helpful.

「Someone similar.....how about Kirua-sama?」

「Father?」

「Someone close to Maria who is also an adult male」

「Well.....that is true」

That part is similar, but it's a different story when it comes to using him as an equal reference. Particularly with presents.

He's my father and he dotes on me very much. If it's father he would be happy even if I gave him weed from the side of the road.

「Your father.....is also quite unique isn't he?」

「.....That is quite true」

As expected, he is familiar about both me and father.

Apparently it would seem the image in my mind was properly conveyed.

「.....Ah, then what about Oresseine-san? He is practically like family and he is also like Kirua-sama」

「Oresseine-san is.....」

Older, an adult, a male. All three match up, and he's sweet towards me but not as much as father. He's essentially like a family member, calling him father's secretary is also a good distance to place him at. Above all Oresseine-san refers to me as "Lord's daughter" or "Miss Tempest" and such. I think he is the closest person I know that would be similar to Greas-sensei.

Isn't he perfect then? Now if I can just remember any presents I gave to Oresseine-san.....

「.....It's no good」

「Eh?」

「I have never given Oresseine-san any gifts before」

My birthday was celebrated every time. Since I can buy anything at my own discretion, I have tried preparing a gift as sign of appreciation and gratitude.

At that time I was also agonizing over what to get like I am now, so I ended up asking the person himself “What would you like?” Now that I think about it he’s unlikely to give a serious answer to a child.

So at that time, he responded, “Ojo-sama being in good health is the best present for me”.

Each and every year, my health and happiness are given as gifts and eventually I entered the academy without ever giving an actual gift.

「Father may have given him something but.....they would never do it in front of me」

「Well.....that makes sense, his position is essentially a servant of Maria so he can’t disregard that, normally a Lord of a House would never celebrate a servant’s birthday」

「Is that right?」

「That’s what I’ve heard at least」

Did he perhaps hear that when he was attending commoner elementary school? Or did he perhaps ask other nobles after coming to this school?

It doesn’t really matter but.....it’s true, I don’t know any other House that would celebrate a servant’s birthday.

I don’t really have that many friends or interact much with others but it still seems to be the case.

Hm.....in that case, would Greas-sensei perhaps not accept my present? He’s no longer my tutor so he’s not a servant, but if Greas-sensei responds to me like Oresseine-san does.

I want to thank him, but in reality it might just be a bother.....

「.....」

「Maria?」

「.....As expected, is it better to just stop?」

「Huh? What’s with you all of a sudden?」

「I don’t really know what he wants.....and if I chose something bad wouldn’t it just become a bother?」

It would be the same as being meddlesome or causing an inconvenience, there’s nothing more troublesome than forcing an unwanted gift onto somebody. Some people just don’t think about others, but there is also such a thing like ego on the sending side.

Appreciating the thought but having no need for the gift, I would be rather troubled. It’s possible to throw it away but then there is the feeling of guilt.

In that case it would be better to stop and just write a thank you letter or something.

「Since it’s up to Maria to decide I think you should do whatever you want.....but was Maria happy when you received your present?」

「Yes.....yes, of course」

Keito pointed to the barrette, which was also shining brightly from my hair today as well. I use it almost every day after receiving it since it's my favorite.

「Greas-sensei might've also felt the same as you when he was picking out a present. Aside from that he's likely also not familiar with what girl's like」

「That is.....」

I wonder about that.....that person was a playboy before after all. He acts like a nice older brother towards me and Keito, but I cannot deny the possibility that the game settings may still influence his behavior.

Well, even if his flirtatious settings still persisted a child who just entered middle school should be out of his range so it's likely as Keito says.

「But Greas-sensei did hand-pick something out for you, and because you were happy about that you wanted to do the same for him. I don't think there is really anything to worry about」

As usual, you're at your own pace no matter the location. I don't think it's good to be too spoiled, but our relationship feels very comfortable.

Besides with Keito the atmosphere is always easygoing.

Somehow it's haphazard, bold, I don't know whether to praise or belittle it.....it's mostly the latter.

But from the experiences of the past five rounds, I can be brave but I can also be scared, I don't want to experience such terror ever again so I want to act as carefully as possible. Whether my plan is reflected in the results is another story.

Like always, I feel as if Keito's existence also makes me feel daringly bold and haphazard.

There is no need to be anxious, there is no need for vigilance, it's comfortable anywhere. Pushing my hesitating back forward.

It feels as if Keito is looking at the original me. The one from before experiencing the past five rounds, the one who wasn't on auto-mode.

「.....As expected, being with Keito is nice」

「.....What's with you suddenly, did you trip and hit your head?」

「Your words are strange and also rude」

I reconfirmed my gratitude towards Keito unexpectedly.....although I will never tell the person himself, he would make fun of me. Or maybe he would just look at me with a weird expression like he just saw a ghost or something.

「Well then, let's charge ahead into all the shops that look nice one after another! Get ready!」

「It's too dangerous to do that for just choosing a present. Look properly in front of you」

Complaining while still following my lead, he truly is a great childhood friend.

After visiting several stores, in the end I finally settled on a fountain pen. It's practical, it doesn't take up space, and there's always a use for it. So there would be no trouble in receiving it.

More than anything, the moment I saw it I thought that it suited Greas-sensei.

A moon-white color gradient and a unique marble-like pattern, it's shiny, glossy, and smooth

appearance is very beautiful. I feel that the golden color of the clip and pen tip resembles Greasensei's eyes.

I had the message card written at the store, and as soon as I returned to the dormitories I asked a butler to deliver it the staff's dormitories.

Chapter 61: The Feeling of Excitement from Happiness

It seems that my thank-you gift for Greas-sensei arrived during the day. I was expecting it to arrive earlier to some extent because we're living in the same area, but it was already evening when I asked the butler. As expected one way or another.....getting too use to this is degenerative. Either way it's bad. Otherwise it could become an annoying or troublesome sort of habit.

In addition, in the morning, before going to school, I received a letter of gratitude from Greas-sensei. It was unexpected, it was difficult to get this past my common sense. But for now let's just be glad it was properly received, rather let's just think of it that way.

This school.....rather this world doesn't have the same common sense as mine. I already knew that though.

Besides there is a little event for today. I don't have time to think about other things.

「So me, Primera, and Eru.....is just the three of us enough?」

「Eru-chan, are there any others you want to invite?」

「Not really, what about you two?」

「I am also.....」

「I am the same, I don't have anyone to invite first of all」

We used a pen and wrote the three of our names down on paper.

There was still plenty of space left on the paper which listed our members. But I'm sorry we cannot write down anymore.

It might look like a scene where we are chatting leisurely together, but we are actually finishing our plans.

Normally right now should be class time but currently we're self-studying.....or rather it's because this is our current work.

「So then the three of us are good enough?」

「Un, I can't work well with that many people anyways」

A new student camping trip is being held at the end of this month, every year the new students of the middle school division are supposed to go on a trip of three days and two nights in order to deepen their bonds. The high school division is just advancing up so apparently there's no need for them to do this, so it's just an annual exclusive event for the middle school division.

While the guidebook says training camp, looking at the pamphlet of the place it just appears to be a luxurious summer resort.

Upon waking up breakfast is prepared by the chefs, there were various sorts of entertainment to choose from during the mornings, during noon the chefs once again prepare lunch, and in the afternoon we break into groups for recreation time. So this is essentially just three days of eating and playing before going home.

The rooms are also single rooms, it's truly just a vacation trip. Where did the training camp element go?

The only part like a training camp is the recreation time with groups. In order to obtain food for dinner, it seems that the group will work together to solve a mystery and play a little game. I would assume that cooking together by themselves would count as cooperation.....but I suppose this is the limit of noble daughters.

It seems we will hear the full details at that time, but I think that it will fit the concept of deepening bonds.

The problem is that each group is decided by themselves and there wasn't any limit to how many people. It would make sense to deepen bonds with people you were unfamiliar with, but letting people choose their own groups will just result in people grouping with their friends. And for those without any friends it'll be no different than hell.

At this point it isn't something like promoting independent decisions anymore, it's just flat-out leaving all the decision-making to others.

「Sasha, come join us!」

「We don't have enough people over here!」

At least the person next to us doesn't have to worry about such matters. Rather he's receiving too much invites that he's smiling wryly.

「.....Sasha-kun, looks troubled」

「It seems there are other classmates joining in」

Both Primera and Eru are watching the fight over the person sitting next to me, this seems like it'll take a while.....no matter who he chooses there will be some complaints.

Also Sashia's personality makes it hard for him to turn down others, being too popular is also a problem. It's a big difference from me who is still being called Mariabell-sama from the majority of my class.

.....I am not jealous, not at all.

「Well if it's Sasha he'll manage somehow. Anyways let's check over our equipment if the group is decided」

Apparently losing interest, Eru was the first to look away. Although Primera still seemed a bit worried, in the end it seems she deemed that there was nothing she could do. She turned her attention to the book that Eru spread onto the desk and began chatting happily.

I wasn't really interested to begin with so there wasn't any particular impact on me. I was wondering what to do if we somehow ended up in the same group due to our seating or something, I would probably be alarmed more than anything.

At any rate various sorts of flags would start to rain down, so of course it's undesirable. It would be bad if I let my guard down towards Sashia.....this time the camp doesn't involve any other capture targets other than Sashia, it's also in an environment where I would be completely relaxed and a long-awaited trip with Primera and Eru.

So it should be pretty fun. Because up till now my only two choices for school events would be either skipping or harassing.

「Are you two already prepared?」

「Not yet, it's a training camp, so I was wondering what clothes to wear」

「Same」

Although it's a training camp, ninety percent of it is actually just a vacation trip, and the place we will be staying at is a fully-equipped hotel owned by the school. It seems that there are many places around the forest and mountains that are not maintained, but seeing it as preserved part of nature further enhances the summer resort. It is a training camp after all.

But since it seems that all the amenities are complete, we can easily spend three days comfortable there with a minimal amount of clothing and utensils. Shampoos, toothbrushes, towels and such can also be brought if the person is fussy.....I wonder if I should? Even if I don't the hotel wouldn't have anything of bad quality, so there isn't any need to worry about shampoos and such. So my hair wouldn't become frayed or anything.

I have about 3 days' worth of clothes, school-designated jerseys, and pajamas. Although it's possible to wear plain clothes, considering Primera in the case she gets lost it's best to have on something easy to move in.

「Then in that case, should we go shopping in Oz on our next day off? For anything we're missing, sweets, and such」

Anyhow, now it's turned into a conversation between friends preparing for a trip.

In the second year of high school there is also a school trip, even though I experienced it five times already this somehow feels fresh. Ahh, it's because when Mariabell and her followers go shopping it's either we're all "going" or you're all "coming". Also although it may be normal for nobles, I just couldn't wipe the sense of incongruity of high school students ordering from private tailors.

In that sense, Eru's sensibility as a commoner is very reassuring. Since she would've also attended elementary school her conduct should be the most normal.

Well~ normal is the best!

「Sounds good! I'd also like to get a new pair of pajamas」

「A new one?」

「Un, Oz has shops that produce certain series」

..... As expected this area is very rich, when I think about the previous gaudy followers it feels even more so. A daughter of nobility being rich is definitely a truth.

「Are you also good with that Maria? Do you have other plans?」

「Un, I'm fine with that, I would also like to buy new clothes」

「Maria-chan is pretty so everything suits you after all」

「No, on the contrary gym uniforms wouldn't suit her, her face would be too beautiful」

「Are you praising me? Or are you making fun of me?」

A pleasant and warming relationship without any selfishness.

And a place where I belong is gradually taking form.

As long as I disregard Sasha, it seems like I can look forward to this training camp.

But before that, I will go shopping during the weekend.....it will be my first time going shopping with female friends. What should I do I'm feeling a bit nervous.

Chapter 62: Average Special Time

Like we planned during the weekends, the three of us came to a store selling women's nightwear and other clothing in Oztown.

Since Primera wanted to get a new pair of pajamas the store fulfilled her needs. It seems the ones she is currently using are also from here too. They're likely cute, but I've never seen them before since we live in separate dormitories.

The school's dormitories are divided into three categories based on social position. Ah, four if I include the staff dormitory.

Eru and Keito, live at the "Heaven's Dormitory" which is for commoners.

Primera and other students from families of Earls, viscounts, or Barons live at the "Prince Dormitory". Students from the Duke house like myself, Marquis house, or royal family members live at the "Sun Dormitory".

Greas-sensei and other staff members live at the "Queen's Dormitory".

It's quite splendidly separated. I feel quite lonely during dinner times. Since the rooms aren't change during enrollment here the students in the high school division are also living in the same dorms, but the messhall and lavish bathhouse are divided into ones for the middle and high school division. There are no shared facilities and even the entrances are in separate areas so it's almost impossible to come into contact.

Incidentally as one can see from the divided dormitories, I am in the same dormitory as the Prince and Tuvalu. There is a "Prince Dormitory" and "Queen Dormitory" yet the royal family members live in the "Sun Dormitory, which is rather confusing and misleading.

Male and females are strictly separated and even messhall hours are kept separate so on an encounter avoidance perspective it is a total victory. Being separate is the best so I won't complain.

On a separate note, there are events of infiltrating the "Sun Dormitory" in the routes of Runa and Tuvalu, but upon failing Mariabell would discover and report you to the faculties.

Since Tuvalu's route is a derivative of Runa's route and entering one will diverge from the other, it is decided which route to proceed by this event, but if the favorable rating for either of them isn't enough it will fail and Mariabell will enter. For the heroine it's an important choice for the good or bad ending, but for me either one is undesirable and will leave me in a bad state.

There weren't any intrusion events for the other capture targets, so it would've been a great help if it were the same for these two.

Although the most optimal options would be to either disregard the forbidden love or to just exclude me from the romance with the capture targets.

「So how about this?」

「I think it's cute, Maria?」

「Me too, I think it suits Primera」

Primera gave a very cute smile in a pastel pink night gown, it was soothing. A feeling I would've never felt when inside Mariabell, when compared to the past it was definitely a refreshing experience.

It was different from the past, the future was also changing, when I think about it I can't help but feel anxious.

Especially concerning the heroine, for example even the previously mentioned incident would be difficult. Even if I could cope and find countermeasures it would still be difficult to decisively execute it.

In that case, what I should be doing now is.

Interacting with these girls, carefully creating memories, and nothing more.

「Alright.....then I will take this one」

「Is that fine? Those are just our opinions」

「Un! It's a long-awaited training camp, so I wanted you two to decide」

Surely, without a doubt.

I'm positive that I just saw Primera slightly looking away in embarrassment.

「.....Well, then how about picking one for me too?」

「Eh, is that really alright!?!」

「Yes, but if it's something weird I will refuse」

「Don't worry, we will choose something perfect for you!」

As I watched Primera drew close to Eru and began stealthily whispering, and my expectations for the training camp also increased.

× × × ×

Around past three, since we were hungry we decided to enjoy tea and cakes at a cafe.

As expected of a cafe partnered with a wealthy school, both the tea and cakes were all very high quality. Both the milk tea and cheese tart I ordered are delicious.

「Everything is quite delicious here」

「It's also very cute, it appears we made the correct choice」

Both of them looked satisfied, it was their first time here but it seems they quite liked it. Since we finished our shopping as planned we had decided to take a break for a while.

After finishing the cakes, our topic switched over to the "loot" we acquired.

「Still, in the end Maria didn't buy any pajamas at all」

「We even went and chose the perfect one for you ー」

In the shop where Primera bought pajamas a while ago, I also asked them to choose pajamas for me.

At first I was looking forward to what kind of cute designs Primera would choose as she ventured deep into the store, but I then immediately dismissed the item they chose as soon as I saw it.

「I can't wear that kind of clothing」

Even if I didn't want to remember it was still deeply imprinted into my memories, a pastel black color of a very different meaning from the depths of the store.

The two of them had chosen a black negligee.

The silky smooth texture that could be understood without touching the glossy surface, the shallow slit section of the V-collar and adorning lace ribbons were rather lovely, I think the style itself was quite good. It was cute and I really appreciate that they thought it suited me.

However, I am only a middle school student. Even if my face is rather mature, I am still a little girl who was not even a student until recently.

I wouldn't even be able to fit into let alone wear something so sexy. Besides it wasn't even a pajama, it was a negligee. Just like the meaning of the word, pajamas are more than sufficient for a child like me.

「Why would you two choose something like that out of all the other perfectly cute items in the store?」

「Because we thought that one suited Maria the best, the design was also very cute」

「Even so, don't you two know the concept behind it? It's a conspicuously "cute" item meant for adults you know?」

The "cute" appeal for that item was that it utilized a sexy color and material. Naive cuteness is only a slight difference away from childish, although for that item it is something that produces a mature sexiness without compromising cuteness.

At first I wondered why such an item would be sold within school grounds, but then I remembered it's a town that the faculties also use, furthermore it's originally just an affiliated branch store located outside the school.

「Children are just as cute as adults, it's not something at an unreasonable level」

It's charming for children to aim towards the level of an adult, but for this situation it's just laughable if you ask me.

Body stature is important after all.

「I thought Maria-chan had more of a beautiful feeling than cute feeling, so a simpler piece would be best」

「I also thought you would be more particular about texture and material quality. Your uniforms are never really complex, even today's clothes has the same feeling」

「Is that right?」

That was true about my uniform, at most the standard cape would just be changed to a coat. My mother had ordered numerous cute pieces so I usually changed them on a weekly or daily basis.

But I was also never really overly-conscious about what I wore. My attire for today was also just a properly causal one, a light green cutsew and a white middle-length skirt. I also brought a cardigan in case it became cold but it seems there wasn't a need for it today.

Plain and simple, I bought clothes that emphasized mobility and comfort, which also made it look like an emphasis on material quality. I only noticed when she brought that up.

「It was done unconsciously, I didn't notice at all」

「Your unexpectedly indifferent, from a glance you seem more like the type that prefers gaudiness」

「I get that a lot, but on the contrary it's completely untrue, since my father and mother were also not great with fancy decorations」

Both of my parents, in particular, my father had perhaps the lowest taste when it came to fancy decorations. He also looks conspicuous and stood out like me. But thinking of it as he became bad at being inconspicuous is also in a sense correct.

Choosing simpler things because their easier to understand yet appearing to be placing emphasis on quality. If I am also like that it would be an influence from my parents.

「It's rather overbearing to wear excessively gaudy or fancy clothing, it's also not easy on the eyes」

「That's true, it would definitely be difficult to deal with」

That's right. As a matter of fact, in the past five rounds Mariabell was very gaudy in not only her appearance, but also her uniforms and personal clothing, all her belongings were very luxurious. I couldn't really understand her preferences.

I had given up because I couldn't do anything during auto-mode, but since I can choose now I will deny that sense of fashion.

「By the way, what happened with the student council?」

「Eh?」

Topics are said to change rather easily for girls, but this is quite the sudden change.

Both of them knew I had gone for a visit so it'll make sense that they would be interested in what happened afterwards. But I hadn't bother mentioning anything since I wanted to escape from reality. The link becomes quite obvious when I put it that way.

「You went there to visit once, so I was wondering how'd it go?」

「I haven't responded yet but.....I was thinking about declining」

「Really?」

「Yes, as expected it's a position that requires responsibility, it'll be rude to join half-hardheartedly」

It's not a lie, I really would. It's just that the feeling of not wanting to voluntarily dive into a troublesome matter is greater.

「Well, I suppose it would be difficult in various ways. Especially this year, including Prince Runa and the other members with their good appearances and social status there will be quite the attention」

「Attention?」

「Mainly from girls」

「Ah, I see」

The point was made without further explanation. In addition to the appearance their status was also very high, it's inevitable alluring for carnivorous females. Particularly with noble daughters being

divided between carnivorous and herbivorous.

A graceful and elegant herbivorous type like Primera or mother.

And a carnivorous type that has overbearing confidence due to their princess-like upbringing like Mariabell.

I don't know if there are extremities like Mariabell, but if there is someone that has confidence to that extent then there would be no reason to overlook the paradise called the student council.

Un, I'm definitely declining. It'll be sad to jump into a group being surrounded by beasts even though I'm not interested.

「I plan on going to decline after the training camp is over」

「That makes sense, we still have to prepare for the training camp」

I can probably finish my preparations in less than a day.

But I want to make it seem as if I spent some time debating over it, and I just want to postpone unpleasant things. Aside from that I also want to see if there's any better reasons for declining.

「Well.....should we head out soon?」

「Ah, that's right, is Maria-chan alright with that too?」

「Yes, I'm also quite full」

Eru's line of sight had shifted towards the clock when she said that.

Before we realized not only was the tea we were drinking gone but even all the cakes, so there were only empty dishes on the table now.

Our purpose of satisfying our original hunger had been fulfilled, so I do apologize for staying even though we already finished.

We called a waiter and paid our bill before leaving the cafe.

「Are there anymore places you two wanted to go to?」

「I was the one doing the most shopping, so I'll just accompany you two for anything you want to buy now」

「I just.....want to eat snacks at the camp with you two so let's do that later」

We already have the clothes we need and there is no problem regarding amenities since the training camp provides them.

Since we'll only be eating snacks on the way to the training camp or at night, it's better to leave that one for last.

「Well then, how about the general store? Because the hairpins I have in my room are fragile I wanted to buy a new one」

「Sounds good! I also wanted to buy a new one」

Since Primera liked cute ornaments and accessories to begin with she agreed happily.

Since we were camping, and with the food procurement test we'll more or less be moving about so I wanted to buy a scrunchie or something similar.

「Well then next up the general store! Please let me know if there is anywhere else you want to go~」

「Oka~y」

Eru walked forth cheerfully as Primera followed suit with a gentle laugh, I then followed after her. Both Primera and Eru act unreservedly around me so it's very refreshing. It's different from Keito, but I felt the same sense of security as I do from Keito.

There aren't any plots since there isn't any overbearing anticipation from me.

The girls know who I am, but even so they wouldn't be dissuaded even if I wasn't the daughter of the Tempest house. If our personalities weren't suited for each other then we would likely be acquaintances rather than friends.

If it were like that it's likely I also wouldn't have stayed with them. So I was happy with our mutual relationship.

「Ah, this looks good」

「Eru-chan, I think that this color would suit you」

「Really? Then I might get that one」

「Ah, Maria-chan! How about buying two of these and do a twintail? It will surely be cute!」

「Twintails.....I'm not sure I could pull that off」

「If Maria-chan will do it I will also do it too」

「Hm, will you really?」

「Of course!」

The general store turned out to be more exciting than I expected, eventually we returned home after buying some sweets without visiting any other shops.

Thus my first outing with my female friends drew to a close.

My spoils were only two scrunchies and sweets, but it was still a very fulfilling day.

On my way home, even though I was alone for some reason I still felt warm in my head and heart.

Chapter 63: A Sign of the Start is the Feeling of the Earth

Days worth of clothes and underwear, sweets and writing utensils, insect repellents and sunscreen are all packed up. All the various sorts of luggage are sent ahead of time, and currently the middle school first years are traveling by airship.

Starting from today, our new student camping trip begins.

「Where is the training camp?」

「According to the guidebook, it seems to be in Leithia's territory」

The country of green "Leithia" most of the land is covered in mountains and forests, it's a place where most of the nature remains intact. The area where people live is limited, and the majority of inhabitants are either magic beast hunters or researchers investigating unknown plants.

Excellent hunters and researchers gather due to the nature of Leithia, many special products are made from materials that are stripped from magic beasts and many medical herbs are processed from the plants in Leithia.

Thus it seems that it's considered a special country regardless of the small population and the size of the country itself. Each country signed a treaty that prohibits invasion, monopoly, and the likes of this country.

To be honest, since it's a country that hardly appears in the actual game, my knowledge is only limited to the information written in the guidebook.

What's up with building a camp in an area filled with magic beasts? Of course, it's protected by a defensive barrier, and the escort includes a leading teacher who specializes in offensive magic.

「Warning.....do not leave the defensive barrier」

The defensive barrier is essentially a dome-shaped barrier. From the air it looks like a shell enclosing the area from all sides. There is no need to worry about it being broken and with the cooperation of the escorting teachers, it will withstand external attacks.

The only problem is from the inside.

Because the defensive barrier is specialized for protection against the outside, it's actually easy to go out from the inside. It's originally designed to just withstand external shocks so that point would of course be quite natural.

Thus it was advised not to approach the boundary between the inside and outside of the defensive barrier. I don't feel like getting close to such a dangerous zone anyways.

「The training camp is quite large, so I think it would take quite a long time to reach the boundary line right?」

「That would make sense」

I nodded in agreement to Primera who was also reading the guidebook.

It's true as judging from the pictures the building was quite large, it's already very abnormal since a

single room could be allocated to all the students. And there are even other facilities such as the theater room, gymnasium, and tennis courts.

「Eru said she wanted to play tennis during leisure hours」

「It's because I heard the courts are very large」

「Even though you already exercise quite a lot in your club, you really do like sports」

「Say that to Primera, at least I chose something different than track」

For the morning leisure hours one can choose anything they'll like to do, yet Primera chose to do handicrafts just like in her club.

Eru likes exercising to begin with, and although tennis and track are both sports their still completely different. But for Primera her club activities is essentially just sewing or knitting every single day.

「Because Leithia has many kinds of flowers, I thought that I could make something new」

So in other words it's not the same because the materials are different. For Primera it seems the details regarding handicrafts is quite specific too.

I wouldn't know but for each their own, it would be difficult for someone not committed to the hobby to understand.

Keito also an interest in flowers right —…….perhaps I should bring one from Leithia as a souvenir.

「It would be great if you could make something cute」

「Un! Maria-chan will be theater appreciating right?」

「Yes, I became a bit interested after talking with Catalia-sama」

After hearing that films of plays featuring the prince of the theater club, Catalia-sama, would be shown in the theater room I became interested.

I've heard about her plays many times yet I still haven't seen one before. Since she's always so gentleman-like, I thought about observing her play for once.

「I am also interested…….please let me know your impression」

「Of course」

「Both of you look outside! Is that it?」

Eru who was looking happily outside the window beckoned us while pointing outside. Looking towards where she was pointing, I saw a wooden building surrounded by vast greenery.

「It really is in the middle of the forest」

Forests and mountains, from an aerial perspective what I saw was a sea of trees. There was also an area covered in pink, white, and other various sorts of colors so likely a flower garden or something, but it's hard to tell just how wide it was due to the vastness of greenery.

The airship began slowly descending downwards. The hotel which gradually grew larger was definitely quite impressive though…….the surroundings of the training camp was just like what I heard

beforehand, but it's scale was still quite different than what I had imagined.

I thought that the training camp would be similar to a luxurious trip, but it seems that the luxuriousness is far beyond my common sense.

「It's quite the lovely place, I was wondering how it would be since it was a training camp」

「It belongs to the school after all, I'm looking forward to seeing how the rooms are」

Everyone else is already use to it, as expected.

Among them, I am the most surprised even though my social status and wealth is higher.....ah, it's because this sort of knowledge is normal for the average person. I immediately began missing Keito.

「The teachers will begin calling us soon」

I felt a slight sensation, similar to the feeling when an elevator stops, which likely means we have successfully landed. Looking outside the ground is also near us.

One of the teachers raised their hands and called out.

「The landing is complete, everyone please gather around!」

I heard that preparing for a trip and the trip itself is the most exciting part, but I am most excited right now.

This was the first time “I” participated in a school event.

Soothing my rapidly beating heart, I enjoyed the reunion with the ground after a few hours.

Chapter 64: Occasional Unusual Life

It looks like a log house, so the feeling of camping is more than I expected. But just as I thought the scale is too abnormal. Aside from the building even the area around it, it's like a golf course.

After exiting the airship and hearing a brief explanation from the teachers, a time for unpacking was set up. It seems that the luggage sent earlier with transfer magic has already being carried to each individual room, so as usual life is easy. I don't want to get used to it as being overly-spoiled can trigger corruption.

[.....This is a hotel?]

These were my first words upon entering my room. It's good I was alone, the words which I meant to say in my mind had instead slipped out.

But is this really a hotel?

My parents' house and the dormitories are one thing, but this is supposedly a training camp? It should be different from the house or the dormitories where I usually live at. Aren't they spending too much for a place which is only being used once a year?

It's only been several years but I felt like I thought that several hundred times already.....as expected my own on spending are quite different than other people. Back then Mariabell's spending habits in school was also quite a problem.

[Oh, it feels nice.....]

Seeing my luggage I sat on the bed and felt a good sensation, the feeling was not too soft and not too hard. The pillow also seems very expensive, luxurious items sometimes give off more of an appearance than actual usability. The mattress is very nice too, so there are no complaints.

After briefly looking around the interior, unpacking time was over. I didn't have any unpacking to do since I had removed anything that I thought I might use from my luggage prior to it being transferred to my room with transfer magic.

So I left my room with a simple map and few possessions towards the theater room to spend my leisure hours.

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The play was "Red Riding Hood". Although it isn't the fairy tale version. Little Red Riding Hood was used as a motif but the contents were almost entirely original, it was a bittersweet love story between Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf.

It appears Catalia-sama is the wolf. I was rather surprised as I expected Catalia-sama to play a more prince-like character.

But apparently it seems she actually does play prince-like roles more often, and plays like "Little Red Riding Hood" are among one of the fewer ones where she doesn't play a prince-like character.

Should I feel lucky for seeing such a rare play or lament for seeing this play for my first one?

While thinking about such a thing, the interior becomes dark.

The tea and confectioneries prepared when the light was still on were quite lovely, and the images reflected on the screen moved like in a film but the angle was kept at the same place and never changed.

It felt like I was watching a home video taken during a children's play meet, but that feeling only lasted for a fleeting second.

『So what is your name?』

『……Who knows, take a guess』

The girl wearing a red hood was blind. She lives in a house inside the forest, and one day she detected the smell of blood and went outside.

There was an injured wolf who had escaped from a hunter, and the girl wearing a red hood had treated him.

Although I was here for Catalia-sama, the girl playing Little Red Riding Hood really did seem like she was blind. Her blonde hair peeping through the red hood shined beautifully under the light, and her acting only vaguely seemed like an act.

Catalia-sama's usual gentle impression was non-existent and she was cool enough to the point one would forget she was actually a female. Her whole body was covered in black and she wearing ears and a tail. Her build was tall and slender to begin with so it really suited her.

A cold attitude and stare. And the process of it softening. Secrets that passed and hurt each other. Grand yet not overly-played, romantic yet not fake.

It could've been due to the good acting or good script, or perhaps both.

Before I realized, I was captivated by the world on the screen.

Chapter 65: Please Learn

「It was truly amazing, I wish I could've seen it live」

After leisure hours, I was currently talking about my feelings while preparing for the food procurement game.

Of course, the contents were about the play I saw this morning.

In the end, the wolf took Little Red Riding Hood's hand and they lived happily ever after. But before that, there were many developments that kept me on edge, and even though it was a happy ending nothing was lost in terms of content. That was also what I liked about it.

By all means, I really want to see a live play and not just a recording!

「Our theater club is top-tier after all」

「Just Catalia-sama alone is really popular」

.....Of course, I can understand that. Everybody watching with me were also impressed, some even burst into tears.

She's gentlemanly to begin with and quite popular as the Prince of the Theater Club. She finds me cute for some reason, and although I've become use to it whenever I talk to Catalia-sama her gaze always becomes quite muddled.

「Catalia-sama was wonderful.....but the actress for Little Red Riding Hood was also amazing. It really seemed as if she couldn't see, and the scenes near the edge of the stage were really suspenseful」

The feeling of her unfocused eyes, her wandering gaze when looking about, the scenes of the wolf worrying whenever Little Red Riding Hood walked around were quite adorable.

I've heard a lot about Catalia-sama but.....I wonder who that person is. Since she had the leading role is she perhaps a third-year? But Catalia-sama seems more focused on skill than seniority.

「What did she look like?」

「She had blonde hair and green eyes. She also looked really mature and pretty」

I assumed she was a third year since her face looked mature but..... judging age based on appearance is unreliable since I'm a prime example. The villainess look messes with my appearance, it makes me look a lot more older than I actually am. Mariabell didn't really look like a high school student either.

「Blonde hair and green eyes.....those aren't really uncommon traits so I can't be sure, but the lead actress is likely Christine-sama」

「Christine.....-sama?」

「She's also in the theater club and a really beautiful person, there's also upperclassmen in my club who are her fans」

Eru's club, so the track team. That person is certainly beautiful, she is also good at acting, so it's not really strange even if she did have fans. When you look at the club dedicated to Catalia-sama the pattern seems quite natural.

「But since Maria-chan spoke so highly of it, I also want to see the play now」

「True, it's quite rare」

「Is that right?」

「Maria-chan is rather indifferent, you're hard to cool down but also difficult to excite as a result」

「Ah-.....yes, I can't deny that」

I've been through quite a lot since I've experienced five rounds of high school, and died several times, also Mariabell's specs are high to begin with. I can't really deny that I'm indifferent in many areas. Rather, since the death flag is constantly flickering throughout my mind, I can't really afford to be too straightforward. That aside I'm not planning on letting up either.

「That's why I'm a bit interested now, it must've been quite the play to excite Maria-chan」

「Maria is going tomorrow too right?」

「Yes, I'm planning to.....」

「In that case, let's say we're going together with you tomorrow then, it'll be difficult to go watch otherwise」

「Sounds nice! Let's go tell the teacher later!」

Those two are planning ahead without me, I feel a bit left behind. I'm also the person concerned here. But I don't mind seeing the play together with these two, rather I would love to. It's fun watching alone, but it's also fun to watch together with friends and discuss impressions. However what we do for leisure hours is scheduled beforehand to ensure proper preparations, so suddenly changing it for a reason like "I would like to switch because I want to go with a friend!" is rather abrupt. They are girls. But suddenly changing might trouble the teachers, it's also a waste of resources.....but it's too late now. It's a bad way of spending budget but it's not really an issue for the wealthy.

So.....there shouldn't be any problems. It's different if they changed without asking but since they're properly asking it should be alright.

Somehow, I've also become quite spoiled.....for now it's not too bad but I'm afraid it might become worse if I'm not careful enough.

「Ah, Maria-chan! Isn't this one of the point areas?」

「It looks new, so it probably is」

Looking over, the two are currently rejoicing in finding one of the point areas for fresh ingredients and waving towards me. Those two really are energetic.

They're usually quiet inside the classroom and well-mannered in public, compared to the high school Mariabell the two are much more mature if you ask me.

But as expected when it comes to events like these, one can definitely tell the two are still in middle school.....although I'm also considered a middle school student too.

But of course I can't really just go with the flow of my age due to a certain silver hair person and certain light blue hair person. It would be scary to act too unguarded after all. Aside from that it's just

simply safer to act more carefully.

The death flag may have lowered a bit, but it's still far too careless.

「What kind of ingredients are here?」

「Etto.....it says an assortment of fruits from Leithia」

「It's not worth much points, but it should be fine for dinner」

We glanced at the picture and words written on the paper and all three of us burst into laughter as we headed towards the next area.

Laughing together with friends, achieving another point, and laughter once again. A sensation that I never experienced before, something that I would've never felt with Mariabell. Different from Keito, different from Greas-sensei, a unique position exclusive only to my female friends.

It was fun, joyful, the lighthearted footsteps allowed me to be more true to myself and at the same time lose an important sense.

Usually I would never forget it. I would absolutely never forget it if Tuvalu were a classmate.

The sole person near me that I should be aware of is Sashia, but it should've been fine if it were just him. In fact, it wasn't even his fault.

If I were to be strictly speaking, that's right.....it would be my fault for letting my guard down.

Chapter 66: A Falling Feeling

The next day, it was a peaceful and pleasant time as usual.

Primera, Eru, and I had fun playing around together, we managed to obtain better dinner ingredients than yesterday and enjoyed a full course ranging from appetizers to desserts.

The training camp is for three days and two nights, so after dinner is over the training camp portion is also essentially over. According to the guidebook's schedule the excursion doesn't officially end until we head back, it could be considered an excursion due to the fun and relaxing nature alongside everyone living together in the same building. Although to begin with this is a training camp not an excursion.

But let's stay up late tonight since it's ending anyways, a girl's night!

That was what Eru said. Primera also agreed immediately so it's possible that the two planned this beforehand. Both of them were smiling brightly as they brought sweets into my room.

Although I was also smiling in the same manner. Having a girl's night in pajamas seems fun, plus back at the academy this sort of opportunity was limited since we all live in different dormitories. Since this is such a rare opportunity it would be a waste not to fully enjoy it.

「As expected, it's really cute」

「I agree, a soft color suits Primera best」

Primera was wearing the cute pajama one piece she bought when the three of us went out shopping. I already knew it would suit her when she bought it, but the sight of her actually wearing it is far more cute than I imagined.

「I don't usually wear those types, since the bottom would slide up when I'm sleeping」

「.....I can understand that」

By the way, Eru was wearing a tank top and shorts along with a long cardigan.

She gave off a rather lively impression, plus her sleepwear looked easy to move in and quite comfortable. I also felt her sleepwear would be most ideal.....but the pajamas prepared by mother were similar to the one's Primera had on, although I was already use to them by now.

「Ah, so that's why Maria isn't wearing a one piece」

「I prefer comfortability when I sleep hence why」

I was wearing a simple but cute pajama consisting of ribbons on the front and sleeves, it looks like a one piece at first glance but I am also wearing short pants along with it. The girlish design from my mother is still there but the short pants is essential for avoiding an unsightly sight when getting up..... my sleeping habits aren't bad to that extent, but I am a lady after all. I'd like to refrain from exposing my underwear when I'm sleeping.

「I think it's cute! It's quite different from Maria-chan's usual mature appearance」

「Thank you」

Essentially, she means I have an adult-like appearance. But she worded it another way.

「While we're at it, how about changing your hairstyle too?」

「Well, I suppose I don't mind」

I undid my hair which I had tied loosely to the side as Primera happily went around behind me with a brush and scrunchie. It was a scrunchie I've never seen before, so she likely made it during the training camp.

The gentle touch from her fingers felt rather nice. Apparently there are many girls who hate having their hair touched, but I quite like it.

「Maria-chan's hair is really soft and beautiful, it's all fluffy」

「It's difficult to manage since it gets tangled easily」

My curly hair doesn't even straighten no matter how hard I try to straighten it. It gets tangled easily since it's so thin and untamed, above all it's incredibly weak against humid weather. It's sensitive to the point where I could predict weather forecasts using my own hair, and the morning struggles with it is completely infuriating.

I thought about using a hair iron to straighten it like Ann use to do for me but in the end it's just easier to tie it half up.

「So it's natural then, I thought you curled it yourself every morning」

「It's to the point where I envy you two who have straight hair」

Both Primera and Eru have wonderfully tame hair. Eru's hair is slightly messy, but that's what also makes it cute. Since Primera usually braids her hair, it's hard to tell but her hair is actually naturally straight, it's truly enviable. Incidentally I also thought this when I met Keito for the first time.

「Done!」

As Eru and I were eating sweets while talking my hair was finished. Primera's voice sounded rather delighted and I could feel the cool air upon my neck.

「I tried tying it into a bun, Maria-chan has long hair so I didn't want to tie it too high up since it might be too heavy」

Ah, so that's why I felt the feeling of cloth behind my ears.

I traced the finely braided hair which was tied to the side by the scrunchie, it seems she made a bun on the side.

「Since it's done loosely you can easily untie it when you go to bed」

「It's lovely, thank you」

I thought of looking in the mirror to properly see it and as we both rose a gentle knock sounded on the door.

It was late but other than that it was an average night, since there wasn't a designated bedtime there weren't any teachers patrolling either. It's a bit sad, but the only two who I can call friends are here

with me.

So I have no idea who else would come visiting.....

「Yes?」

I wondered if it was perhaps a friend of Primera or Eru but they also had a look of confusion. Of course I couldn't just ignore whoever it was and there wasn't really anyone at the training camp that I would do that to, so although I was confused I opened the door without any particular thought.

Shortly afterwards, I would come to regret this, I really wished I would've ignored the knock or pretended to be sleeping.

Truly, it seems my crisis avoiding ability has really gone downhill to not detect this danger.

「Mariabell-sama, gokigen'yo, may I speak to you for a moment.....?」

But even so, I just never expected such a cute looking girl who was glancing down apologetically to harbor such dangers.

Chapter 67: A Deceived Feeling

How did this happen? Although I asked there's no meaning in answering. It's quite obvious how it ended up like "this", and I also understood the reason too.

That's why in this situation rather than "how" it would simply be better to ask "why".

「Everyone finished drawing lots yet~?」

「We're all done over here」

「Same here, we're also all done」

To my surprise there were several boys and girls of my class gathered together. The girl who came to my room earlier appears to have just been asked to be the messenger.

The actual mastermind was currently nodding in satisfaction as he saw the two empty boxes with a dazzling smile as bright as the sun itself.

「Alright! In that case, everyone now check the lots they drew ー!」

Him.....everyone slowly began checking in response to Sashia's voice. It seems there were also some students from other classes mixed in too as the class size appeared a bit larger than usual.

If I knew it would've turned out like this I would've declined. Ah, but Eru and Primera were both interested so in the end I probably would've been dragged along anyways.

As you may have noticed, I am currently not in the single bedroom that I am staying in for the duration of this trip.

The previous girl's pajama party that we were happily enjoying a while ago now seemed like a mere lie, after changing out of our pajamas, Eru, Primera, and I all headed outside the hotel following the girl who came to my room earlier.

As soon as we exited and went around to the back of the building, we saw a group of people gathered around near the forest entrance, which was our destination and current location.

Although I had a bad feeling about the situation, everyone except me appears to be having fun. There were some girls who looked a bit uneasy but were gradually starting to smile from the surrounding fun.

「Well then, I'll begin explaining the rules for the test of courage!」

A training camp, a test of courage in the forest at night.

I wasn't actually expecting myself to experience one of the key main events of otome games.

Moreover, it's even in an actual forest instead of a constructed setting, isn't this a lot more dangerous compared to the test of courage the heroine had in the haunted house during the cultural festival?

Although ghosts won't appear just looking at the vast forest is already an eyesore.

Of course the proposer of this idea did obtain the teacher's permission so considering that...

「Pair up with the person with the same lot number, then head towards the back of the forest and pick a flower from the flower field there before returning back here. Since maps will be distributed by pair, everyone pair up first!~!」

I checked my slip of paper as told.

Eru and Primera also showed me their lots but all three of us had different numbers. I already expected this due to the number of people, but it was still a bit disappointing.

「Number 3 —!」

Eru seems to be having fun.....although her liveliness isn't something new. She glanced around before rushing into the crowd while assertively raising her hand, it would seem her "fear" from this test of courage was overridden by enthusiasm.

「I am number 7.....」

「.....Primera, are you alright?」

「Y-Yes.....I am just a bit nervous」

She then gave a forced-smile.

She appears alright since she hasn't ran away yet, but it seems her pairing will determine her fate. I'm a bit worried she might injure herself out of fear.....but everyone else also seems rather tense so it should be fine.

「I am number 12.....」

I glanced about but I still haven't found the person I'm paired up with yet. It seems that there are more male and female pairs, but it's also quite cute how the frightened girl groups are sticking close together.

To be honest, I'm actually fine.

It's a test of courage, so there's no point thinking that I'll be harvested by a certain "light blue haired" grim reaper. It's also trivial when compared to the dark times of wandering about aimlessly with no food or water when exiled from the country.

There is one person I'd like to avoid though, but with this many people the probability of pairing is quite low. So I should be fine unless my luck in lot drawing is rock-bottom.

Also there's even the possibility that Sashia won't even be participating. Somehow he seems too busy with coordinating work, I could easily imagine him staying behind as coordinator.

Anyhow, either way these concerns will disappear the sooner I find my pair.

「Excuse me, who has number 12——」

「A-Ano.....」

When I raised my lot with the number written, I heard a voice interrupt me and my wrist was grasped.

When I turned around in surprise, a girl with dark brown pigtails stood there with a red face.

Probably a classmate, I don't know her name, but I've seen her around before.

「Etto.....are you my pair?」

「N-No, I.....」

「.....?」

She looked flustered or rather troubled or perhaps.....ah, resolved, or something like that. She had a bright red face that made me worry whether she had a cold or something, her eyes were also a bit teary. Rather than participating in this test of courage I wanted to tell her that it might be better to rest up in her room, but it seems she was completely determined.

「I-I.....have a favor to ask!!」

Her voice was frantic and raised, but her agitated demeanor of requesting was on the contrary very cute.

Although we were classmates, I was deeply charmed so I have no problems accepting without hesitation.

「Maria-san, over here! Thanks for asking for me ー」

The appearance of a brightly smiling Sashia coming forth made me remember the feeling of having a heart shattered into pieces, this has to be an illusion.

I *had* no problems.

Until just now, I never meant for it to be in past tense though.

Chapter 68: The Few Fears

This might be an excuse, but the bottom line is this is less of my lot drawing skills being rock-bottom and more of just the flags not really liking me. Anyways it's not my fault.

To begin with it seems my pair was neither Sashia nor the girl, but instead a boy from another class. If he would've just been my pair, then my training camp could've ended in peace.

But then somehow I ended up changing with Sashia due to a bitter-sweet love reason.

The boy who was originally my pair and the girl who was paired with Sashia are apparently childhood friends that are officially engaged.

Although it's rather questionable since the two are still only in middle school, this sort of thing is not that unusual in this school.

Being engaged to a person you've never met since birth.....these sorts of engagement stories are so numerous for the upper class that it's outright annoying.

Apparently the engagement of these two were also decided by their families, but it seems the decision was made because the two were in love to begin with. In the world of otome games such heartwarming background stories are even prepared for mob characters, the difference in treatment compared to me who plays the villainess for all routes of the capture targets is astonishing.

Such treatment is truly enviable, but as expected the two middle school childhood friends couple have quite the good relationship. It's a healthy male and female relationship without any major issues, but the girl on the contrary seems to be uneasy because there weren't any issues.

She felt the distance between them hadn't really changed much from childhood friends even when they began dating, thus due to his same attitude she began wondering whether he really was in love with her. A middle school girl with cute girl troubles.

Since the two were childhood friends they would be close to begin with so it's not really strange that there's not much change.....but love makes people blind.

They're still only in middle school, so there's no point in worrying over their relationships like some couple from a romance novel.

As a villainess whose life is full of drama, I think it's better to have just a stable relationship instead of a really romantic one.

However, for her who wants even the slightest bit of change, this test of courage is a major event. So I couldn't turn her down after hearing such cute worries.

But in regards to lightly agreeing without any hesitation, I do regret that.

「But I'm sure glad the other pair was with Maria-san~」

「Is that so.....」

I am not glad at all!

I may have also been at fault for not checking the girl's pair first, but I didn't really expect her pair to be one of the capture targets of the game. That girl aside Sashia is also delighted, it would seem there were many people desiring this pair-change. Of all people I ended up getting paired with one of the

love-dovey engaged couple.

Perhaps I should withdraw what I said about this being less of me being bad at lot drawing.

Or rather, should he really be participating?

「.....Are you really fine with participating?」

「Eh?」

「Because you.....」

「Sasha, are you paired with Mariabell-sama?」

A cute sounding girl's voice interrupted my words, then just like the impression I formed from the sound of her voice, a cute looking girl came between me and Sasha.

She had on a friendly looking smile and was someone I saw often around Sasha.

「Sarah, what's wrong?」

「I came over to hand out a map」

「Hm? Wasn't Sarah just in charge with making the lots?」

「Since there are many participants I am helping out~」

Judging from the lighthearted tone from their exchanges the two are likely good friends. I was completely excluded.

If she was on such good terms with him, I would definitely like her to take my place.

「Mariabell-sama, if Sasha does anything strange please don't hesitate to scream!」

「Don't say something so misleading!」

「Hahaha.....」

It would appear she's quite friendly...

Although since she's a friend of Sasha, it's not strange for her character to be similar to his to some extent, I'm currently still unfamiliar with most of my classmates.

I don't really believe in this much since all my friends are rather different from each other, but it seems similarity does breed friendship.

「Sasha is last right? Since I'm going second, I'll be going ahead~」

「Don't trip~」

Sarah kept smiling brightly until she was out of sight, she was very cute. I could see the difference in feminine charm.

But she's also good friends with Sasha.....Un, safer to not associate. She seems to be a good person but since her type is completely different from mine, I don't have any chance.

Hmm, that aside.....

「We are going last?」

「Ah, yes, since I'm sort of the coordinator, we'll be the last to go.....sorry, do you not like that?」

「No, I don't mind」

「That's good, but I am sorry for having you exchange pairs」

Un, I also deeply regret doing that.

Not just because I ended up with Sashia but also because I neglected to confirm first, I don't care about waiting for the test of courage since I'm more than patient enough.

But my concern is not that.....

「I still have duties to attend to, once the first pair comes back I'll have to send the next pair so wait here for now」

「A-Alright.....」

「Well then, see you later!」

Raising one hand in goodbye as he left, an unfamiliar sense of anxiety was left behind the receding figure.

I can only hope this test of courage will end without any problems.

Chapter 69: Guilty Feeling

While walking along the dark path I stared absentmindedly at the tip of the glowing wand. Since the route back is from another way we won't encounter anyone.

I was aware since I saw the map beforehand but it really was far. It seems the students organizing this really went full out.

「Etto, take a left ahead.....」

The map depicts the path splitting into two a short distance ahead. After taking the left path it seems there will be a clearing with the flower field.

「It appears we're about half-way there」

「Yes, that's right.....」

「.....」

His face was displaying a smile as usual, but it was clear that his smile was lessening and his voice decreasing. His pace also felt slow.

At first I thought that he was trying to match my pace, but apparently it seems that wasn't the case. He was walking next to me a little while ago but now it felt like he was merely following me from behind.

He's easier to read than I thought.

I thought he was suppose to be good at concealing his feelings, but then again he still has four or five years left to mature.

If he didn't like this that much he should've just made up a reasonable sounding excuse to decline, it would appear he was still rather naive in regards to that.

「.....Are you alright?」

「Eh?」

「You don't look too well, so I was wondering if you were perhaps feeling sick」

「No, I'm fine, I was just surprised that the atmosphere was more than I expected」

Sashia then gave a laugh in his usual manner and his usual demeanor returned. If I also didn't know anything, that smile would've convinced me that I was just needlessly worrying.

But I do know about him.

Although it was just based on plain information, it's still enough to the point where I could imagine what he was feeling right now.

「.....I see, if you do feel sick we can turn back, so please do tell me immediately」

「Thank you」

There is a feeling of guilt for not saying anything even though I knew about it. But then again it's not something that I as a classmate should be talking about. It would end right there if he were to ask how I know this information, so it's essentially just sealing my own fate.

To be suspicious, that's all it takes to bring down a person like me, since the rate of my reputation can

fluctuate so drastically it's rather painful.

In the end, I can only finish this test of courage as quickly as possible without raising suspicion.

.....But if it really is that hard on him, let's just say that I am scared instead and retire.

「Ah, left here」

The road divided beautifully into a Y-shape just like on the map, both paths were dark and the destination ahead couldn't be seen.

Although it does feel a bit creepy, the flower field should be directly up ahead as long as the scale on the map wasn't wrong. In that case the time spent dawdling around here is wasteful.

「Finally half-way.....」

It seems that a sigh and unusually quiet voice leaked out unconsciously. The voice that he didn't intend for others to hear is the complete opposite of his usual cheery self.

But whether the other half would feel long or short, either way this really was too forced.

Feeling that I should end this as soon as possible while Sashia could still stand, I quickly moved ahead towards the left as instructed by the map.

× × × ×

The organizers for this event were mainly Sashia and his group, looking at the maps it could also easily be seen that they were also handmade by Sashia's group. They definitely would've checked them beforehand and perhaps the teacher even also confirmed them, but I was still prepared for some degrees of inaccuracies.

I thought that the distance seemed a bit farther from the entrance, but it was still within expected range. It was likely an error of about five minutes, but I still didn't feel the slightest bit of uneasiness.

I wonder at what point that I started to feel that something was off...

Was it when I started to notice that there weren't any signs of flowers anywhere? When the path itself kept getting darker and narrower? When it went beyond the expected time? My doubts began to gradually increase and became full uneasiness when I saw what lied in front of me.

「It's here, right?」

Since my sense of time was ambiguous, I couldn't tell how long we walked.

I had followed the route on the map, continued walking, and found the same large trees as on the map.

The two trees were twisted together like a spiral making it appear as if it were a single tree, and gave off the impression of everlasting that wouldn't be lost even if it were made into a painting, it looked exactly as a cloth would while being wrung.

These were one of the trees used as a landmark on the map, but more importantly the map didn't indicate anything beyond this point. There wasn't much on the map to begin with, but it was originally suppose to be a simple straight route so that wasn't strange.

In other words, this is the clearing.

We're suppose to pick the flowers here, then return back and the test of courage would then be over.

「……But there are no flowers?」

Chapter 70: Troublemaker

According to the map there should be a flower field in front of the trees, but there weren't even any weeds growing let alone flowers. The ground was bulging from the roots of the surrounding trees making it difficult to walk on, and there wasn't a trace of the said flower field, rather the atmosphere itself felt eerie.

「Why.....the map」

Did we make a mistake?

Thinking that, I hurriedly check the map, but the route to this point was practically a single path so there shouldn't be any mistakes. The only part was just the single left turn we made.

We should've been progressing exactly according to the map.

「.....Is the map perhaps wrong?」

It wasn't an impossible thing. Judging from the appearance the map was handmade, likely from the students in my grade. In other words, mere children who only recently started attending middle school. Even if a teacher checked the map, he could've just thought that all the other maps were just copied from the one he checked.

「Sashia-sama, this map——」

「.....Eh, ah.....what?」

In response to my voice Sashia's shoulders started to shake and his expression was stiff to the point where it could no longer be concealed. Even the corners of his mouth were barely in a smile and his eyes were widen.

The fear was no longer being concealed.

「Let's head back, the route, or perhaps the map was wrong.....but I think it should be fine if we head back the way we came」

「Ah.....yes, that's right.

He exhaled a sigh of relief to my words. On the other hand, as a person who knew his inner turmoil I felt troubled.

I'm sorry but I can't really do anything about it so there's not much I can comfort you on, right now the best course of action would be to return to the hotel as soon as possible.

It would be nice if he could also regain his composure before we return but...

I turned my back on the weirdly shaped trees and began walking back towards the way we came.....or I should have.

「Eh——」

Before I could begin walking, I heard a sound coming from behind me. In front of me Sashia looked surprised and his eyes widened even more, on reflex I looked behind me.....and I instantly regretted it.

A dark figure. It had arms and legs, but only three fingers. The body was covered in something resembling fur and flowed about even though there wasn't any wind. There were no eyes. And no nose. But there was a mouth that was slightly opened, and I could see sharp white fangs inside of it.

If I were to compare it to something it looked like some sort of huge lizard creature.

A pitch black face with only a mouth was facing straight towards me. Even without any eyes my instincts warned me that it could still clearly see me.

It wasn't a human. I wonder if I could even call it an animal.

I didn't know what it was since this was the first time I've ever seen it in my life, but I knew of a general term.

「Dem..on.....?」

There are places that are slightly different from a typical textbook description, but I could tell it was definitely no pet. It was neither cute nor beautiful, it's dominating presence was also quite different from that of a lion.

As if it were breathing or pulsating, its body throbbed at regular intervals and glowed darkly, the ominous feeling brought forth a chilling atmosphere.

「Why is it here.....!」

This place was within the training camp, and since the forest was being used for the test of courage it should be an area where safety was guaranteed.

But we were also off our original planned route. I didn't want to acknowledge that we had stepped out of that guaranteed safety without knowing, I didn't want to re-acknowledge the importance of such a guaranteed safety in a place like this.

「Maria-san, over here.....」

「W-.....」

The demon's gaze..... it's hard to tell since there is no eyes, but going from the trajectory of its gaze there is no mistake.

Don't turn your back to it, don't make any sudden movements, and slowly retreat while maintaining eye-contact, these were the steps one was suppose to take when encountering a bear. Regardless of whether it would work in this situation, I still knew that recklessly running away at full speed wasn't a good idea.

The defensive barrier should still be working properly, but it's likely I stepped out of it by mistake, this was no laughing matter.

I began slowly and gradually retreating backwards while maintaining eye-contact.

But in that tense moment, I unconsciously remembered something. From a long time ago, something my mother said.

Look forward properly while walking. Don't look around.

「Ah.....!」

Because you trip quite often.

Every time I ran around playing with Keito, fell over, or ended up with a bruise, my mother would always anxiously tell me this. I thought that it would be more relaxing to play around like a child but the plan ended up backfiring, so I began to act more carefully like I was told.

But I ended up forgetting about it until this moment, was the timing good or bad?

I was walking backwards without confirming what was beneath me and the moment I remembered my foot was caught by an unearthed tree root.

The fact that I instinctively reached back my hand to stop myself meant my reflexes appeared to be properly working.

The problem was that there was nothing beneath my outstretched hand.

「Hu——!？」

While one hand properly felt the ground beneath me the other hand met empty air.

My body which had its balance thrown off couldn't resist the force of gravity and easily fell backwards through the trees and into open air before I even realized.

「Wai-, no.....!!」

Just what is going on, how did this happen?

I unconsciously reached out my hand to grab something and before I could fully comprehend what was happening, my thoughts had come to a complete stop.

Chapter 71 Part 1

Apparently, I lost my way in the forest through the mountain. Stepping aside, the place where I was, was just near of the slope but, because the trees had overgrown I hadn't noticed where I was. Trying to get up with both my hands and feet, I was still unable to get up. Luckily, my body was fine, but I didn't understand the meaning of this...

「Maria-san Are you alright?」 Sashia asked.

「...Eh, somehow」 I managed to reply.

Despite being covered all over in scratches, there were no large injuries and I was not hurt. By getting injured, there was a possibility that there would be a one day delay from being able to do anything, quickly, during the time I was falling down, I had protected my head while I was unconscious and I must have acted quickly to have defended myself.

I wasn't hurt, but having to fall down from a height of that distance made me think that I was safe enough at the moment.

「Sashia, are you sure you aren't hurt?」 I asked him.

「Yeah, I'm fine」 he replied back.

Because he rolled down the same path as I did, Sashia shared the same scratches I did. Still, I worried for him especially since he was laughing, it's because of his popularity that he could react like that.

「Sorry about that, I ended up rolling down with you」 he spoke.

By all rights, I should've fallen down by myself, but he grabbed a hold of my arm that I had stretched out when I was unconscious. He did help... with the result being both of us being injured, but he did keep me from falling. However as he was still a kid, he has yet to become a man. While he was a sporty kid, his height didn't help going against gravity and he didn't have the strength to pull me up.

Though, I shouldn't have been that heavy...

「No, I apologize, it's due to the mistake on the map, since I was the one who had it, I'm sorry」

「Because I tried to not get us lost by looking for a path to take so we could get the flower, the fork in the path was different from the map. With that... Perhaps I made a mistake along the way」 I apologized.

Because I tried to not get us lost by looking for a path, that as much as I could, would lead us to the location to get a flower, the fork in the path was also made a legitimate path from the map. Though, I lost my train of thought as I gazed at Sashia's pale face, but the fact that I was able to remember anything at all was quite surprising. And if I wanted to do anything about our situation, then I would have to rethink everything. At least I was good at telling when I was lost.

「Well if that's the case, you were the one who saved me from falling, Sashia-sama. Truly... I am grateful」 I said.

「Any way, we did end up falling down together, didn't we?」 He laughed off.

Still, keeping this mask on is trouble some, though it is much more preferable than being killed, I guess.

(TN: HAH. Death is the least of your worries, Reverse Harem is coming up soon.)

My fear still exists, meaning that I am still terrified that at any time these blue eyes will betray me and lead me to my death.

「That's good.」 I spoke cheerily

「Huh...?」 He questioned.

「It seems like you've returned to your regular self Sashia-sama, your complexion looked horrible」 I responded

Currently, we were going to leave the situation behind us, but only if Sashia's mental state was alright as it appeared that we needed to wait for his anxiety and worries to disappear. If his fears were to cross over any higher will he be able to calm down afterwards or will this fear dissolve? Would the drastic measures of shock therapy be able to cure such a feeling?

Oppositely, I was relieved; Sashia was completely surprised his face expressing so. He was like an open book with how surprised he was, it was so different from his usually smiling face, it was amusing to see such a gap from his usual behavior.

「I'll wait a little bit for the teachers to come and find me, I'll just need to find a spot to sit while waiting for them.」

Though, it was really inevitable for us to have to stand around for what felt like eternity. For now, it was calm, but then I began to fall backwards down the slope, I wondered what type of injuries I would sustain from this, Since I had used my muscles to defend myself, they ached. Luckily, there were not only a lot of trees where we fell, but also a lot of flowers were growing, and from there it was easy to find a place more comfortable to wait at. The scratches weren't as bad as I thought, It seems that it's thanks to god that we were substituted these pillows. As one would expect, that explanation is absurd, but it's the only one I have.

Translator's Corner:

Hi Guys! Thanks for checking out the first part to this chapter, I meant to get all fifteen pages translated, but I have some personal issues currently, so I hope this little bit is enough for now! ♥

Chapter 71 Part 2

After we confirmed that where we landed was not moss, the two of us sat down together where the weeds sprouted from the soil of where the tree's roots were, where there the plants had grown green.

「Uhm, Maria-san」 Sashia asked me.

「Hm?」 I responded.

「When did you notice that I wasn't acting like myself」 He questioned.

「...From the very beginning, I had noticed that you had gone pale」 I replied.

Wasn't pointing out the change in his demeanor supposed to be as simple as that? Or was it that until now, he was able to keep up his mask and keep it concealed? Maybe it was both... In reality, the game's heroine was the only one to discover the difference in Sashia's behavior but never called it out. I guess I haven't been watching myself as carefully as I had thought.

Having already lived through the game five times, I have already noticed the preconception of Sashia which was assuring but, it was a mere foul technique, why? Because it made me receive these feelings of guilt. But also, I had to separate the previous runs of Sashia from this one. By no means was I going to lose my way in the end! Never!

「I should've kept myself from noticing at the time, I'm so sorry!」 I apologized.

「Maria-san you didn't do anything wrong at all! I was being unreasonable by trying to keep up my family name, therefore it was my mistake!」 Sashia spoke back.

Masochistic smiles truly don't match Sashia at all! Is it because it was so striking that I wanted to laugh? is the thought of seemingly laughing at children loudly so evil? Although I felt as though it was only a smile that seems painful after engaging with someone like Maria Bell... more so, it's a funny thing to see.

「The way of the night doesn't look so good」 I stated.

The dark road tonight is very scary...

I had to restrain myself from casting my eyes down at Sashia's smile, keeping my expression hidden behind my hair with my mouth stiff in a small smile. If Sashia were to see me... well let's see...

I tried as best as I could to keep my voice up and lively, but to my own dissatisfaction, my voice was not able to produce such liveliness.

For Sashia, the first thing I wanted to hide was the very chance of the discovery of my lies. I wanted to only be left alone somewhere far far away.

「I know about my grandfather」 Sashia spoke softly.

「Eh... Roman Dorothy」 I responded

Recorded in history and in textbooks, Roman Dorothy was the world's best flame magician. Those who learn magic and even those who aren't able to use magic alike as well as those from far away know of

his greatness and very being. Just to be able to see him from a distance away would make you feel higher than the clouds themselves! But to Sashia, he was just a grandfather.

「The truth is... he's an amazing person, and everyone knows it」 he spoke happily.

Everyone praised him and Sashia blushed with respect on his cheeks. And if that's the case, everyone called him great. It was something to grow accustomed to, but in that case, Sashia had greatness to be expected from him. Because he descended from that person, he had the right to be chasing after his legacy.

His grandfather's child, Sashia's father, was unable to conjure magic for years. Early as a magician, his expectations faded and he married into a commoner's family like everyone else, but then Sashia was born. It's a lovely story, a common type of happiness. There is nothing more to wish for after all, but some dramatics would be nice. A small change came to such a family after Sashia was able to run and started to play.

「Do you know of attribute magic holders?」 Sashia asked me.

「Well...」 I responded.

「I- that... Come again?」 I could only sputter out.

Sashia's family, while being that of a commoners, was very close to magic because of their world's best flame magician relative. It was said that they used a little bit of magic everyday without being tied to any attributes.

That's right, with one of the best magicians by my side, I could expect anything and I would be able to handle it. It is a smart move to trust yourself more than your tutor. Even though I was greatly satisfied by my tutor Linda-sensei.

But Sashia said he was an attribute holder... I didn't hear it, or it was a secret to Mariabell, but both could exist.

「Because i know now, my perspective has changed」 I said.

There are many people who refuse to look at it and accept that the nobility have troubles controlling their magic, not to mention it's a secret kept away from public knowledge. I learned the method of controlling my magic from Linda-sensei, and if I learn it properly, my control over magic will be the same as an ordinary magician.

Normally for us, it is different from attribute magic holders as well. The nature of magic differs from person to person.

It was individuality, but also specialty. By nature, you inherit your abilities through blood, like Sashia, who it was said that his surroundings reacted to the magic around him. It is easier to hard if you are from a noble birth, but for commoners who don't live such easy lives without access to secret services, it can be difficult, especially if they didn't get along with their neighbors. Especially if it had anything to do with a noble, those secrets were good stories to listen to.

In Sashia's case, there was a heavy expectation that he was going to fail and with that came a lot of pressure upon Sashia, but from afar it's hard to see what type of difficulties he is struggling with. Expectations are things to be evaluated, and ones to keep an eye on.

Even among young children, if there is any reason to have it, heavy pressure can be reflected as jealousy. And it's difficult for such young children to try and suppress such an intense jealousy. There is no time to run away in such a small place like school.

「I was invited by a friend to come here to the forest at night, the woods aren't a big deal since during the day, it becomes everyone's playground」 Sashia said.

This forest is a small and narrow place. During the night, there is barely any moonlight, making this place dark, but during the day, children's voices overflow from this park, giving the impression that this is a safe place. Seemingly, children have made this place seem playful.

「I don't think I could appreciate this place. I'm just a little surprised」 he spoke.

He must have been stressed out by comparing himself to his friends, Sashia must be envious of them. But since I only had one close friend, I couldn't relate to Sashia who had so many. I'm just a little bit worried for Sashia, he might be the descendant of a wonderful wizard, but now he is just a child, and he can't change that! And I think Sashia know that about himself as well.

By the time I noticed, I was already alone he spoke solemnly.

That doesn't mean you were deserted, you are just a bit fearful right now. Sashia was dark, thoughtless of the sound of the wind passing through the trees, but it was not enough to feel fear. If you just played, you laughed, apologize if you get angry, make it a secret between close friends when you go home.

Your friendships will end in due time, but do not end them yourself.

TN Corner:

Thank you to Reichel Anne Roxas for giving me two coffees!!!

And thank you all for your comments! I love hearing back from you all ♥

Also, Sashia you are being depressing af my dude.

Chapter 72 Part 1

Through this pitch black darkness, I was able to see a shining light. At first, I thought that the moon was reflecting off some type of glass, was I going crazy?

(TN: Awe, don't worry, you ain't going crazy yet).

In front of me there were two marble like balls of light. In time, I came to realize that it was a human, and I thought that my dear friends had come back to get me. Yet both of my thoughts were wrong.

I do not remember well from here... but I could remember a pair of bloodshot eyes that were glittering and shining

Whether they were an adult or a child, their sex, face or even eye color, were all things that I could not recall. But those two spheres of light emitting from the darkness were not things to be forgotten.

After everything that had happened, I was told that there had been fugitives who escaped into the forest, so whatever I saw must also have had to been like what they said.

After the the two of us had left for the challenge, Sashia's group of friends started to worry and had set off in search for us, and once the adults noticed we were gone, they set off as well, if they had come even a little bit later, I might've just have gotten my eyes gouged out.

I remembered the face of someone from my family looking worried and crying. Following that, I was surrounded by my sobbing friends who were apologizing while crying next to a scolding voice.

The sudden fear that had followed me was intense, but still I couldn't remember anything about Sashia's group. But it didn't matter since my friends who were crying in front of me with fear and repentance are much more important to me than some memories of a fearful experience that I cannot remember.

Everything turned out ok! And we all laughed. And because my father gave an explanation to the palace guard, I was able to return home. Just like that, my body seemed to be much more tired than I had perceived it to be and I tucked myself into my bed, falling fast asleep.

I thought I would be fine — I thought that the people surrounding me were just worrying too much, but it was just my own optimistic thinking. Suddenly, as if it were resurrected from the dead, a horrifying memory struck my mind and sent me spiraling into fear, labouring me as I tried to calm down. Forget it, damn it! If only if I had never remembered in the first place, maybe it wouldn't have been as big of a deal... Naturally this playthrough of the game was definitely going to be much more different than I had once thought; it was abnormal, it was strange.

I can't sleep with the lights turned off.

At first, this change was uncomfortable. I couldn't sleep in a pitch black room, and if I did my heart raced fast as if it were excited and my eyes were clear but burdened — tired and restless. Not only was this room dark, but the corridors were pitch black as well, which gave me anxiety — enough to make me want to cry. And I only grew more anxious as the sky outside gradually began to fade into the vacuum of space called the midnight sky.

TN Corner:

Hey Guys, so before I post the rest of the chapter this weekend I'd like to apologize for posting so late, I have just finished finals and am finally on SUMMER BREAK!!!! But do comment below if you like the way I'm translating this chapter since I'm no longer directly translating and more of general translating to make it readable.

And thank you all for your comments! I love hearing back from you all ♥

Chapter 72 Part 2

The look in his eyes was much hotter than his father's anger, but much cooler than his mother's serenity. Like boiling water to a frozen glacier. It was similar to the way a light took place in someone's life, but just like the light, there was darkness in his eyes, one that was just as important, but could not be escaped from. Just like running away from death, and like how the sun will always set, the sky will turn into night for a period of time. I was nauseated by imagining what it would be like to have Nyctophobia (the fear of the night and darkness), just thinking about it made me stressed as the fear would come time and time again as it happened every day to night.

Having no choice but to endure the darkness for hours until the light showed itself was just too much. Even the darkness from closing your eyes would make you uneasy, and if it were me, I would watch the sun's light until I lost consciousness. However, I would eventually get used to it, even if the my fears were so dreadful. But with Sashia, if he kept his room lit all day and night, then he would be able to sleep without his fears approaching him every time.

"But Maria-san, you were the first to notice," Sashia whispered.

Yet, for every day that we went home, for every night that we slipped out every year to participate in this test of courage, no one noticed: I did not notice.

"Did your friends notice...?" I asked.

"I desperately hid it from them, the time to apologize never came up either... so I just never told them...I'm such a coward" Sashia explained.

Damn it! Sashia's friends did this! Just because they were jealous of him and confused why he wouldn't tell them about this? And he probably wouldn't care, he would just apologize to them because he felt guilty.

Besides this nonsense, Sashia's heart was truly too kind.

"Besides... the grandson of a flame wizard afraid of the dark? What a joke..."

(Tn: SASHIA I WANNA HUG YOU)

A man who starts a fire to push away the darkness can not run away from the darkness, I thought. Everyone thinks that Sashia will come forth from greatness, that their expectations will all hold true as he is his grandfather's grandson, not shivering away from the darkness. Anyone would crack under that pressure, his heart would expose its weaknesses.

"Even though I hope to live up to their expectations, I can't say that I can, even if I want to do it to support you," he continued.

The look on Sashia's face was full of bitterness, as if he were being condemned for having fear. It made me feel the amount of tenderness that came from Sashia's heart; which was amazing, but also pitiful and made me feel sorry for him. The expectations put on him by society because of his lineage would expect him to follow his grandfather's path. And actually, Sashia too was a fire attribute. And even if Sashia didn't come from our school, you could still see the expectations put upon Sashia because of his grandfather.

"To not notice, even from the very beginning..." I started.

Even when I had heard about the test of courage, I had the courage to hide. I hid my fear of the map being wrong, and even of the beasts that I thought we had seen until then.

"Sorry for ruining your expectations like this..." Sashia spoke quietly.

This desperate concealed secret of Sashia's...

The expectations upon him to become a genius would not stop until he himself fell from the very top to the ground. And once he hit the ground, society would smile and point at him while laughing at his muddy appearance, as if everything before it were all a lie. Just like in the past, when Maria Bell fell in love with him and became disappointed by his fears.

But of course, only a few of those people exist. Rather, barely any exist at all, and even if there were true prodigies in existence, they would just get back up and keep going — nothing would stop them, even society. Because the noble will never be damaged no matter how hard they hit the ground.

However, Sashia's case is different: with the environment we grew up in, society pushed him to become a genius and he could not fail them now.

Then, I spoke.

"It's absolutely stupid isn't it?"

Started, Sashia looked up at me.

I had spoken words that he never could have imagined hearing before, ones that he wished to hear the most. The scars in my heart are definitely not healed yet, but if I didn't say something now, what difference would I make as the new Maria Bell from the old one before?

Still, I thought.

"If that's the case, then it sounds like you believe in those expectations too, Sashia."

TN CORNER:

BOI YA GOT ROASTED.

Any who, I'm so glad that I fixed the last chapter and got this out today! Tell me your thoughts below and I just might update tomorrow! Your comments fuel my translator lust >w<.

jyane!

Chapter 73 – Then Cry Like a Child

Wanting to live up to others' expectations, that is a very commendable attitude to have. It was likely that this desire to not betray an ideal image that had been forced onto him came from a place of kindness.

Sashia was a good, kind person. It was a good thing that he could have pity, relate to others and seriously face them.

But that was also why it felt so foolish.

What he thought were expectations were, in fact, something very different. He should understand that, if he really believed that his grandfather was a great man.

“Surely being the best in the world is not something that can be easily achieved by bloodline alone.”

If one has accomplished great things, it is common for others to focus on those accomplishments alone, and neglect the road that it took to get there. Even more so because, while magic was a department that most people were aware of, there were few who had more than a cursory knowledge.

Magic that occurs at the wave of a wand appears to be simple, even to the point that magical tools can be purchased in town, making them common items in everyday life.

Furthermore, as Sashia had not decided on any attribute yet, perhaps he just recognizes magic as something he can enjoy even at his young age.

Surely, I knew more than he.

“Magic is a very big power. People seem to forget that, because it looks easy, but there are times when just one wave can change everything. That is why it is praised...as a great accomplishment.”

I knew it almost too well, what would happen if you used this power wrongly. Just as the tragedy of Mariabell's last days showed, the result of abusing your power as a noble was one of all kinds of misfortune.

How hard and painful it must have been to climb to the top, to reach number one in all the world while using it right, without ever making a mistake.

“Your grandfather worked hard for years and years to win that title. It is most absurd that you think that you can carry it just because you are his grandson.”

As long as the same blood ran through their veins, then it was likely that they had similar qualities. Just as I had inherited my appearance from my parents, Sashia had inherited the same attributes as his grandfather.

“Perhaps you have been blessed with the perfect starting point from the moment you were born. You are at a much closer position to anyone else to that title... But, that is all that it is.”

It's not where you start from, but how you continue to move from that point.

And everything was for Sashia himself to decide.

“If you could make the expectations of others into your strength, then that would be fine as well. But if that was not the case, and if those expectations were only a burden on you, then you should be able to get rid of them.”

If the unrealistic expectations that others force onto you end up blocking your path, if they prevent you from seeing any more than one route, and if they are so painful that your childhood memories become unspeakable, then you should abandon them.

Sashia had the right to break away from such worthless bindings and move forward.

“You should be scared. You should speak up about things you hate, things you are afraid of. Your value as a person will not drop because of it.”

And even if it did cause people to be disillusioned, that’s all it was. Erasing something that was only an illusion, to begin with. It does not mean that great qualities Sashia actually has will also disappear.

It is usually only the person themselves that feel ashamed about not living up to others’ expectations.

Even if they have preconceived notions about you, in the end, most do not care all that much.

“...You are so strong. Maria.”

He smiled with a slightly troubled expression, his eyebrows looked sad.

Until a moment ago he was ashamed of his fears, but now he was ashamed of his inability to act like how I was suggesting. I could tell from his face. So much was revealed in that face, that it was a wonder that others had not noticed it. Was it because I had so much prior knowledge?

The fact that he did not become upset at my bluntness here, rather, he considered his own weaknesses, that a sign of how kind and good-natured he was.

He could care for others as naturally as breathing, and yet he was somehow able to have such a low opinion of himself.

“...No, you are the one who is strong.”

“Huh?”

“You are living proof that to be fearful and to run are not the same thing.”

Even now, for someone like Sashia who had a fear of the darkness, this moment may be something like torture. Even if you have become numb to the fear, it is not as if that trauma is cleanly swept away.

And yet, without running, without giving in to the chaos, without blaming me, he is able to talk normally and smile.

How much courage must that have taken?

“And so I return those words to you.”

If I ever returned to those days.

If my will was completely sealed again.

If I was again, dragged back into a world with auto mode.

I would surely not be able to smile. Even if I knew that it was futile, I would give my all in order to resist. And surely, I would spit out a curse on everyone who found me guilty. Regardless if it was Mariabell who had sown the seeds of her own demise.

I could not be like Sashia, and forgive others while reflecting on my own faults.

“Sashia, you are strong. That is not what I expect from you, but something I have witnessed with my own eyes.”

There was no need to compare him to the best in the world, such ideals could be laughed away. He was a person with a strong appeal. Objectively speaking.

Still, for the villainess(temporary), he was still one of the creators of flags.

“...I think I have said too much. Please forgive me.”

“Uh, it is nothing...”

I said too much... I do think that I should fix this tendency I have to say whatever comes to my mind.

But it is difficult to change one's own personality at this point.

It was clear that I had said too much by the baffled expression on Sashia's face. I tried apologizing, but it was likely meaningless. I tend to easily forget after repenting.

There was a brief silence. If he was so afraid of the darkness, it would be good for me to talk and distract his attention, but I didn't know what to say.

Hmmm... But as I was thinking about this, something bright appeared in my vision.

“Ahh...um, look.”

The light looks like a firefly as it moves gently...one, two, three. It was clearly not a dog or a cat.

Sashia noticed where I was looking at and seemed to have an idea of what it was.

Quite some time had now passed since we slid and fell down here. There was plenty of time for someone to become worried over our late return. They would have gone for help.

“Sashia! Marybell!”

A familiar voice. It was probably our teacher. I feel a sense of relief as the presence becomes ever closer with the sounds of rustling.

“Teacher! Over here!!”

- Sashia waves his hands broadly and calls. Teacher and two others finally see us, and Sashia and I are at last able to return to the campgrounds.

On the way back, I wondered what I should do now that I had suddenly discovered Sashia's weakness. But when I saw that Primera and Eru's were almost in tears as they awaited us at camp, I realized that there were more important matters.

Chapter 74 – Young Friends

The first thing I did upon seeing my friends burst into tears, was to apologize for making them worry. But they only scolded me for not getting treated first, as I was covered in scratches and scrapes. I explained that this whole thing had happened because I had mistaken the route back, and had involved Sashia in the process. They couldn't tell if it was the map that was wrong, as I had lost it when we fell. In any case, it didn't change the fact that it was my inattentiveness that had caused it. I wanted to avoid any kind of witch hunt in regards to the map. If it was understood that a noble had been injured because of a commoner, then things would become very troublesome. Even if there wasn't prejudice over your class, there would be a distinction. The world was a hard place to live in.

I was treated by the person in charge of first-aid, then returned to my room to take a shower. I had to change my clothes anyway, but I was also careful not to let the bandages fall off. None of them were anything serious, mostly lots of small scratches.

While I couldn't soak in the bathtub, I was still able to wash my hair before getting out and putting on my pajamas. Just when I was finished, I heard a knock on the door.

"Yes...?"

Who could it be at this late hour? Maybe it wasn't the most ideal time to take a shower, but this was quite the disaster for me. It wasn't just about the muddy bedroom or being a noblewoman or a girl.

"Maria, are you awake...?"

"Primera?"

She sounded much more deflated than usual, but it was her.

There was no need to hesitate now that I knew who it was, but she was not alone when I opened the door.

"Eru too? What happened?"

Both of them were in their pajamas as well, and neither of them looked happy. Their eyes and nose were bright red, and while they weren't crying, it seems like they would at any moment.

They had worried about me and cried with relief when I returned. I had assumed that they would have quickly gone to sleep, their hearts and bodies must have been tired. And so I was going to tell them about what happened tomorrow.

"...Your injuries, are they bad?"

"Oh, this is really an exaggeration. It's only a scratch."

It was more efficient to bandage the whole part instead of each scratch individually. And so my foot and part of my arm were wrapped up. There was a waterproof effect put on with magic, that allowed me to keep them on while showering.

"I am to be looked at it again when we return to the academy, but it is not supposed to scar."

It really was just some scrapes, though I really did tumble down, so I would undergo an inspection. Even the teacher who had treated me said it would probably be fine, but I should get checked just in case.

“That is a relief...”

“I’m sorry for making you worry so much.”

As if relieved from the bottom of their hearts, they visibly relaxed their tense shoulders. I felt bad at what I had put them through. It had ruined what was supposed to be a fun time.

“Is that why you came to see me?”

“Uh, um...that as well...”

“...Uh, um...”

Their expressions that were so dark only a moment ago were now a little troubled...reluctant. They looked at each other for a second, then Eru opened her mouth after keeping it tight until now. I hadn’t noticed it until that moment, but it was very rare for Eru to keep silent for so long. Not that she was especially talkative, but she would usually talk before Primera did.

“Um...could we sleep here tonight?”

“Huh?”

“You’re injured, and maybe it would really be best for you to rest in peace...but, something...makes us uneasy.”

Their friends had gone into the forest and had not come back.

Apparently, that had a much larger effect on them than I had thought. But it was really not surprising, I think I would have felt the same if I were in their position.

Even if they knew that I had returned safely, they were still worried when they couldn’t see me.

Baseless thoughts would still run through their heads. What if I had not been found? What if I had been badly injured? Their friend may not have been here now.

“...Thankfully, this bed is big.”

It was too big for one person to sleep in, but it was perfect for three girls.

“I, I always wanted to sleep together with a friend.”

“Then...”

“Here, get on. We have to sleep early or they will leave us here tomorrow.”

“Yes!”

“Thank you, Maria.”

We three sat down on the large bed. Primera was gently wiping my still wet hair with a towel. Not roughly scrubbing it, but as if slowly soaking in the water to avoid damaging my hair. Just like Ann had done before entering the dormitory.

Soak in as much moisture as possible before drying the rest with hot air. Like pulling the hair downward and drying it while its straight. That way you can control the volume...I think. Primera dried with the towel and I finished the rest with the hairdryer.

It seemed like Primera enjoyed touching hair. Especially mine, as it was long.

“Maria in the middle!”

“Uh...I don’t mind being on the edge. I wouldn’t want you to fall out.”

“That’s what we should be saying. You are the one who is hurt.”

We all fit rather comfortably in the bed, even though it was technically a single bed. Now, did I move around a lot in my sleep? ...I wouldn’t know, I have never seen myself sleep.

I wondered what might happen to our friendship if I kicked them both off in my sleep? Seriously.

“Also, there would be no point in us coming if you aren’t in the middle.”

“...Alright.”

Apparently, it was important for me to be in their vision in order to deal with this fear that I had brought on them. That was why they had come, so their choice was obvious.

Now that we had decided our places, the only thing left to do was to sleep. There was nothing to do tomorrow but return, but there was still a strict schedule to adhere to for waking up.

“Okay, good night then.”

“Good night.”

“Good night...”

Eru seemed like she would fall asleep at any moment. I thought she sounded a little soft and then before I knew it, I could hear her soft breathing. In three seconds. I was jealous.

“Primera. Are you not too squished? Do you have enough blanket?”

“I’m fine. Thank you.”

Eru and I weren’t very big, and Primera was on the smaller side. It was kind of miraculous that three junior high school students could sleep in a bed together like this. And normally, I would have had it all to myself.

Really, I don’t think I will ever understand the wealthy.

“...I’m sorry.”

“Hmm...?”

“For suddenly forcing ourselves onto you. We know that you are okay now, you are safe... You’re alive, we know that.”

I turned my back toward Eru so that she did not wake up. Now that we were facing each other, Primera held my hands in hers. She always had the softest air about her, like she was the perfect image of refinement. But now she had the most surprising strength in her grip, it was not painful, but it could

stop the circulation of blood.

But I also felt that this strength represented her fears, and I could not tell her to let go of me.

“But it’s no use... I tried to sleep, but I was so uneasy. I knew I would have bad dreams. No, maybe you were still in the forest. Maybe you being here is the real dream.”

“...”

“I’m so glad. Really... Thank you.”

Why was she thanking me? Because I was found? Because I had not been gravely injured? Or was it in gratitude for everything I did for her?

With those last words, the strength left her hands, and she entered a peaceful sleep.

Now that I think about it, they had both cried so much. Perhaps Eru had only fallen asleep so fast because she was exhausted.

“I’m sorry...”

I probably had a certain resistance to things that affected many normal girls. Of course, for negative things. Frankly, I was just glad to not be dead.

But even with this incident, it has probably affected me less than others would expect. I had been lost in the forest, any normal noble lady would have...a normal child would have been traumatized by it.

And yet I could probably enter the woods again without a second thought tomorrow.

But I did feel bad for the tears that my friends have shed.

They had worried for me, worried about my body and my heart. They were so worried that the mere sight of me had brought them to tears.

“Thank you.”

I felt so bad about it, but I also felt happy. Did that make me twisted?

It was like I was being tickled, it made me anxious. It was an emotion that I could not easily accept due to my lack of experience. It was a relationship that had been alien to me until now, in spite of reaching so many different ends.

Marybell did not have this. I was stuck between two precious things that I had attained from square one. I knew that I would have good dreams tonight.

Chapter 75 – If the answer is inside of my memories, what’s wrong with inventions?

n the morning, we all woke up without a single person having been kicked out of the bed. Even the blanket was neatly covering us, just as it had been when we fell asleep.

I had assumed that Eru would toss and turn a lot in her sleep... I’m sorry, that was very prejudiced of me. As for Primera, she never even moved while in bed, and was almost worryingly still...was sleeping quietly a skill that all rich people had?

Both of them left my room once so they could get changed and prepare to leave. I also changed from my pajamas and back into my normal clothes. Since we were just going back, I decided to loosely tie my hair with a scrunchie the Primera had given me.

“Maria, are you ready to go?”

“I’m coming.”

Our belongings would be sent through teleportation magic, just like how they came, so those were left in the room. I only took things that looked like they would be useful in the airship and left the room behind me.

There was still a little time until we had to gather together, but there was already quite a few people there. I guess most people would rather hang out with their friends then wait in their rooms by themselves.

“Maria, over here!”

“We got drinks already, are you fine with milk tea?”

“Thank you, I’d love some tea.”

It was almost like a corner of a Café, but this was still part of the campgrounds. But why must I explain about such things at the end of the two nights and three days stay? Really, the service here was impeccable. Like it was really trying to invite me into this corruption.

The cups would even be brought to us as soon as we sat down, it was all a little too perfect!

“You look a little different.”

“Well, it would be a waste not use something you gave me.”

Tying just half of your hair up was too much trouble, but leaving it all down would put it in danger of getting tangled. A hair clasp would have made things easier, but Primera had given me a scrunchie.

“I wanted to make one for Eru too, but I’m not really good at making these.”

But Eru’s hair was quite short, and she rarely used anything other than hairpins anyway. The scrunchie she made was created from cloth, and overall didn’t really suit Eru very well.

Our conversation was like any midday chatter, but we were still just waiting for everyone to gather together. Of course, more and more people started to arrive along with the movement of the clock. And we were hardly surprised when one of those people approached our table.

“Maria, do you have a minute?”

Even if that person who approached us was Sashia.

In fact, I had a feeling that he would come.

Normally, I would not be too happy about this and would have hoped that he turn around, but today was after yesterday. There was nothing strange at all about him talking to me. It was exactly what I had expected, it was within the boundaries of what I would allow.

“Sashia! How are your injuries?”

“It’s mostly just scratches, sorry for making you worry.”

There was an overblown amount of bandages wrapped around his arm, but it was probably just an efficient way of dealing with lots of minor cuts, like mine.

He also seemed to be quite steady on his feet, so there was no worry that he might have sprained his ankle. We had both been incredibly lucky, that was all I could say.

“You two, do you mind if I borrow Maria for a little bit?”

“Ah, then we’ll go over there and look around.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay. Let’s go, Primera.”

“Sure. See you later, Maria.”

“Yes.”

They must have not wanted us two injured people to move, so the two of them got up from their seat and went to mingle with the other students. While Eru was usually quite careless, she sometimes could be very quick about these sort of things. She was perhaps a secretly, highly perceptive girl.

Besides, she clearly started to act before I had even replied, because she knew that this was about what had happened yesterday. I had no intention of rejecting him, and I was thankful that things could move along smoothly.

“Sorry for interrupting you three.”

“It’s nothing. I can talk with them whenever I want.”

He couldn’t seem to stop apologizing, but neither I nor the other two really cared. Whatever it was we were talking about, it was not important. If anything, Sashia’s was clearly more urgent.

He had to say it now. Before they went back to the academy and things became awkward.

“Um...it’s about yesterday.”

I knew it. What else could it be about? If anything, I would have been shocked if it was somehow unrelated.

It must have been hard for him to say because he kept his mouth shut. But I had a vague idea. And I also had a way of dealing with it...that I had been thinking about.

“Yesterday, about me... I would like to tell everyone myself. One day, I want to be able to tell them... so, if you could keep that a secret.”

“–Oh? What could you be referring to?”

I tilt my head to the side and put on a textbook dumb expression.

Apparently, my answer had been so unexpected for him, that he didn't understand what I meant. He looked like he was wondering if his message had not been properly conveyed.

Perhaps he had not been clear enough? The worry began to grow in his expression, and finally, he began to furrow his eyebrows as if very troubled. If I ever made the same expression, people would think that I was in a bad mood. I was a little jealous of him.

“Um...yesterday, I...”

“Ah, now that I think of it.”

“Ah...”

I reacted as if I had only just realized what was happening, with more than a little exaggeration too. My acting was not great.

It was really the level of acting that needed some extra lessons, but Sashia seemed to have been convinced by it. He was clearly happy at the thought that I had finally understood what he had been trying to say. Yes, I did understand. If anything, I understood the moment he approached us. But, I'm sorry. I was going to completely betray his expectations instead.

“I never did get to thank you properly.”

“Huh...?”

“Last night. It was all my fault that you were involved and even injured. I am so sorry.”

I would draw attention if I stood up, so I continued while seated.

“Thank you so much for helping me.”

I tried to make the words as clear as I could, with power in every single word. And when I was done, I bowed my head.

“Oh, ah...no, I didn't...I mean, that's not what I meant! If anything, I should be thanking you for yesterday...”

“No.”

I would not allow him to question or reject this. This matter was decided.

Sashia had only been involved because of me. That is what I explained to the teachers yesterday, it was something that I had pushed forward as fact.

When I had learned of Sashia's weakness and considered what to do...I decided to act as if it had not happened.

After all, how was I supposed to deal with the weaknesses of a love interest anyway? It would be a trump card if he were an enemy, but I've been trying hard to prevent that from happening...I don't need a trump card that will explode in my face!

“You were only involved because of what I did.”

Yes, now that was the truth. I don't know a thing about Sashia's past, his trauma, his weakness. Nothing.

Sashia's weakness would become an important element of his romance with the heroine, and it was something that I honestly wanted no part in. And so I picked the opposite choice of the heroine, to avoid this 'our little secret' moment. I prefer the 'I don't know anything. This has nothing to do with me' route.

"It is almost time to gather together. We should leave."

"Ah...oh...yes."

There was actually plenty of time left, but I had nothing more to say. So we were finished!

We both got up from our seats, and Sashia was immediately surrounded by his friends. They didn't go near him when I was around... Was I that scary? I thought that I was restraining myself to only look a little tough.

"Mariabell, good morning!"

"Oh, ah...Lady Sarah. Good morning."

"Ahaha, just Sarah is fine."

I looked around to see who had called to me and saw that it was Sashia's friend who I had talked to a little the previous day. She was standing there with an adorable smile. Sashia had called her Sarah...

Um, it was kind of a guess, but it seemed that I was right. I would never forget a name. It's just that what happened later was so shocking that it escaped me for a second. That's all.

I think she must have come to talk with Sashia but was polite enough to greet me as well. This must be what they call 'great communication skills.'

"Yesterday must have been rough for you. How are you now?"

"Oh, it looks worse than it is. The injury is practically nothing. Thank you."

"I see. That's good."

"I'm sorry about yesterday. I'm sure it was an inconvenience to you all as well?"

I knew that Eru and Primera had worried about me, but it was also likely that the people that had planned this outing were feeling unnecessary guilt. To have participants of their test of courage go missing like that would have caused quite the burden on them.

"There is no need for you to apologize, Mariabell. No one would have suspected that the map was wrong."

"...What?"

"I didn't know it myself, but I am still the one who gave you that map...I'm sorry!"

"Ah...no, it was my own lack of attention. Please don't be bothered by that."

"Thank you. I am so glad that the two of you were okay!"

See you later then! She said with a smile before taking off. She was almost like a female version of Sashia, and she was even off to see Sashia. It was amazing that two friends were so alike.

Since I hadn't known her name until yesterday, that meant that she didn't appear in the game. Or she was a nameless mob character of no significance. If that was the case, she was just a cute and friendly classmate.

Though it did seem odd that she was friends with Sashia, but there was no harm in them simply talking together.

And while I may not be able to become friends with her, I felt that we could develop a friendly relationship as classmates.

And yet, there was still a strange uneasiness that I felt over it.

"How...did she know about the map?"

I hadn't even told the teachers. It was something that only Sashia and I knew about. The true reason for what happened that night.

"Maybe Sashia told her..."

Perhaps she was apologizing as she felt responsible for planning it... I honestly didn't care, but it would be very bad if she were to spread that information, and I hoped that she wouldn't. She could be sorry by herself. Specifically where no one could see her.

"...That felt long..."

More people were here now, and I could sense the end coming as the voices grew louder. In only a few more minutes we would be flying in the sky. Tonight we would be sleeping in our now very familiar dormitory beds.

So much had happened. Too much had happened during these last two nights and three days. But when all was said and done, I had a fun time and made lots of good memories. Some were irregular...and psychologically burdensome, but it was ultimately a fun trip. That is not a lie. I actually feel a little sad that it had ended.

It was a field trip until I returned to the house. It was a camping trip until I returned to the academy. Thinking this, I decided to look for my two friends in order to enjoy the last moments of this camp.

...Ah, I forgot to see the flowers for Keito.

Chapter 76 – Return to me, Lingering Feeling

It was now the fourth day after our return. The slight anxious atmosphere had finally settled, and we had completely adjusted to our daily routine.

I was ready to do the final trial that I had completely forgotten about.

After school, when there were few people in the hallway, as they had all gone off to their clubs or committees. I was standing in front of a certain door.

At least five minutes had elapsed since I arrived. My desire to avoid going inside was being reflected in my legs, which showed no sign of wanting to move. Really, I did not want to go in there.

I didn't want to go in, but I must go in. It was so bothersome to me, but it would only get worse if I ignored it. I couldn't let that happen.

I made my decision and knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"Mariabell Tempest. May I come in?"

"Ahh...enter."

"Excuse me."

The familiar voice made my 'caution' gauge jump up. It was familiar, but not the voice I had wanted to hear. It made me want to leave, but there was no use trying to leave once I had already said my own name.

This is an otome game. Where's the save and reload function?... I had felt such annoyances many times until now as I opened the door.

The first thing that I saw was the person who had spoken to me. I wasn't surprised, but there was still a disappointment. I wanted to have somehow been wrong, but the person who was sitting there was exactly who I expected.

"Hello, Prince Runa. I'm sorry to disturb you so suddenly."

"I don't mind. I heard about the matter of receiving the answer for the invitation from Julius."

"Thank you... is Prince Julius not here?"

Presently, there was no one but Runa and me in the room. I was happy that Tuvalu wasn't here, but I couldn't say I liked being alone in a room with Runa either. Ideally, neither of them would be present.

"Julius and Thomas are working on each departments directory. Tuvalu and Seeka are at the teacher's office."

"I see..."

What terrible timing I had. This was just my luck. Things weren't too bad since Tuvalu wasn't here... no, it was still the worst.

"I'm sorry to disturb you while you are busy. Shall I come back at a later time?"

Translation, I want to come again later, so may I go now?

“No, I don’t start working until everyone returns. You don’t have to worry about that.”

I wouldn’t worry about something like that. If anything, I wanted him to say that I should leave because he was busy.

“Please have a seat. Will you have tea or coffee?”

“...Tea, thank you.”

Yes, I failed to escape. If it had to come to this, I might as well just say no and leave.

As I sat down on the sofa just like I had the first time I came here, the butler appeared without making a sound and offered me a delicious looking cup of tea. It was honestly scary how he could erase his presence like that. If only he would learn the significance of having your presence sensed by others.

“So, what will you do? You are welcome if you choose to...”

“I am very sorry...But I came today to reject the offer.”

I have been apologizing nonstop for a while now. Even if I hated it, this was still a prince that was in front of me. There were many princes at this academy, but Craine was without a doubt, the biggest country. The academy itself was on Craine soil, so their power was not to be underestimated. The thought of displeasing him was frightening in itself. And I was here to reject an offer! But it wasn’t as if I was in the wrong either!

Inwardly, I was quite nervous, but I make a show of looking very sorry about my decision. It seemed that Prince Julius had already guessed it, but I didn’t know about Runa. I never really did know what he was thinking.

I tried to imagine what his reply would be, but I couldn’t, as I sat there in a cold sweat... But Runa’s reply was surprisingly not too concerned.

“...I expected this.”

“Huh?”

“Julius had told me that you were likely to say no.”

“Is that so...”

Thank you, Julius. I am suddenly much more fond of you than I was before. Though, I now felt even more guilty about rejecting the offer.

“Do you mind if I ask why?”

“...The student council are representatives of the students. I feel that it is irresponsible to enter it without adequate preparation.”

The prepared explanation comes out smoothly. Yes, that was good. Though, the whole thing was a lie. The real reason was that I did not want to be around possible love interests. Especially, Tuvalu. That would be torture. But still, there was a monstrous gap between the face I put on and my true feelings. But perhaps this was a good skill to have in navigating the world.

“...Oh, I do not think that it is something so grand.”

“Huh...?”

“Nevermind. I understand your reason, as unfortunate as it is. I am sorry to trouble you.”

“Ah...no, I am sorry for not being able to help.”

He had mumbled something that was too soft to hear, but I let it slide as he did not want to tell me. Not that I was all that curious about it. It was not good to know too much about potential love interests anyway. That was the most important thing I learned at camp. The second most important thing was the importance of friends.

“It is nothing for you to worry about, Miss Tempest. It was we who have involved you without proper consideration.”

His expression hardly changed, but his words were always straightforward and with no lies. He was completely different from Tuvalu who seemed to have meanings behind hidden meanings. He could learn a thing or two from Runa, since he adored him so much.

“Thank you. Well then, I will...excuse myself.”

The others might return if stayed here too long. Like Tuvalu or Tuvalu and Tuvalu.

Though, I did want to see Prince Julius... I would just have to ask Prince Catalia about it later on. They seemed to get along, and asking a third-year student will probably be a good idea.

I stood up and bowed. My feet felt much lighter, now that a weight had been lifted from my heart. Or was it just me?

In any case, it didn't change the fact that I felt much more cheerful now. I think I would stop by the gardening club and tell Keito about this.

Such were my thoughts as I reached for the door. But...

Just before my hand touched the doorknob, there was a click as the latch opened from the other side.

“I'm back no-... Ahh, Mariabell. You're here.”

Chapter 77 My Wrath

It appeeeceared!!!

I didn't scream it so someone praise me please. Aah, it's not a ghost or a magic beast, although it certainly feels like one.

The figure I encountered while trying to go home was the very common Tuvalu-san. Appearing at such a peaceful place... Is this a horror?

This person standing in front of the door would usually know the timing to enter, but his surprised face when he noticed me made me realize it really was a coincidence. Tuvalu's surprised face, how precious. I'm not happy at all though.

If I could, I'd like to push him aside and flee but, if I did that I would probably be unable to look over my shoulder ever again.

"How do you do, Tuvalu-sama. Please excuse me."

"Good day to you. I'm sorry, I was out doing work... I ended up leaving you alone with Runa-sama."

Your smile is scary right now you know. Runa's expressionless face is much more honest. It's my first time seeing someone reacts this way to their childhood friend being alone with someone else. Well, surely no one but me would notice, he has a perfect mask afterall.

"What do you mean, Tuvalu?"

"I'm concerned about your hospitality. Although a butler is here, you're not tactful."

"... Shut up."

The way he deals with me is way too different, I mean Tuvalu, of course. The two childhood friends smiling and talking; if I didn't know Tuvalu's true self it would be a charming spectacle.

But, it's not something I want to keep watching.

"Then, I will be-"

"We should have the snacks from yesterday. You came all this way so please have some. We can't eat all of it by ourselves."

"Aah, come to think of it..."

"Please, Mariabell-sama. I will prepare some black tea."

"... Yes."

I hate my disposition that can't say no. But, the prince did invite me after all; it's not something I can just reject.

By no means did I lose to the temptation of sweets. Absolutely not.

"Help yourself to what you like. We have plenty, so don't hold back."

"Thank you, very much..."

It was like teatime, with even black tea and a cake stand. The cakes were crammed closely together and varied from shortcake to choux cream. There was even gâteau chocolat. The student council has such snacks? The collection almost made me regret declining to join them.

“Itadakimasu.”

“Yes, please go ahead.”

When Tuvalu said that, for some reason I felt like I had been served poison. Although he was giving off such an impression, of course in reality it was normal, delicious cake. Tuvalu obviously wouldn't do that to food that Runa would eat.

Taking up their offer, I chose a gâteau chocolat, and ate a bite. The perfect level of softness that melts in my mouth combined with my favorite flavor of sweet chocolate is the best. As expected of a tribute for the student council, and the prince.

“It's delicious, very.”

“That's good... We don't dislike sweets but we can't consume this much.”

There are two people sitting in front of me, but for a while now only Tuvalu has been opening his mouth.

It's a characteristic of being Runa's childhood friend. Runa naturally isn't much of a talker. In contrast to Tuvalu who if you disregard his interior, you see a nice young man. At least, to everyone besides me, his smile gives off a favorable impression and his tone is calm. That's if I didn't have my personal opinions though.

“Come to think of it, I heard you found a second attribute holder, or something.”

“urk....!”

“By the sudden statement, the black tea in my mouth almost spurt out. In front of the prince, in front of the son of a noble, a young woman doing that is unfavorable.

I resisted barely enough, but my throat moving in such an odd way made me almost choke. Of course, I resisted that too.

“I heard that the new attribute holder you discovered is your childhood friend”

“Eh.... Yeah. Yes.”

He was speaking pretentiously but, I wonder if Tuvalu has met Keito before. He did say he was in the same class as the prince but maybe Tuvalu and Runa are in different classes?

I was under the impression that the two were one body and soul but there are three classes so they could be separated.

“It's a little impertinent of me but, you should be careful. Although he may be your childhood friend, the difference between the two of you is like the heaven and earth.”

“What....?”

Because his expression and tone appeared worried, for a moment I did not understand what he was saying.

He's talking about my childhood friend, Keito. I understood that but, what does he mean "be careful"? That's not vocabulary you'd use for childhood friends like Keito and I.

"You can't be sure that he's not using you. After all, he is just a lowly commoner."

"...."

Tuvalu's words stirred many things from within me.

It was to punch him in the head or be completely silent.

I could feel that the cup in my hand was endangered, so before I dropped it I put it down on the saucer. I couldn't remember the aftertaste of the black tea that was just in my mouth.

"Tuvalu, speaking like that is—"

"A valuable opinion. I have never had that thought before. As expected, the words of someone in the same position as me have credibility."

"Tempest-sama...?"

"... What do you mean?"

"Oh you know, Prince Runa and Tuvalu-sama are childhood friends too. Finding fault between strangers such as my childhood friend and I—you have experience in the same position so that was your aim, right?"

".... I'm using Runa is what you want to say?"

His face looks dark, I could see he was mad.

Reasonable, I did just clearly insult their relationship. I intentionally formed the words and I ridiculed them from the bottom of my heart so he wouldn't misunderstand that.

That's why, I think.

"You really are lacking in imagination."

Even though he understood my insult.

Even though he knew my words were an invitation to get angry.

Why don't I have imagination?

"The anger you feel now from having your feelings towards the Prince taken lightly is the same as mine right now. I'm angry you spoke ill of the relationship between Keito and I, so I wonder why I can't say the same to you?"

Just like how I trampled over his wrath, he had also ridiculed something precious to me.

As far as Tuvalu is concerned, the only trustworthy people around him are Runa and his younger sister. He has nothing else he considers important. Because he is always witnessing gloomy things and is

familiar with the corrupted side of a beautiful surface, the world Tuvalu sees is full of preconceived notions.

Among Tuvalu's narrow field of view, I don't know where I stand—nor do I want to—but there is no doubt I'm hated tremendously. I accidentally said I knew his secret after all. He's surely on guard towards that.

And, for a topic to hurt me with, Keito is the best one.

If it's about me then I can disregard it easily. No matter how many times I'm made a fool by my eye color, it's fine because I can explain it clearly by saying people have different sense of values.

But this time, Tuvalu chose to ridicule Keito as a method to attack me.

I don't want to imagine what he was trying to do by saying those things but, he was probably trying to plant seeds of suspicion that my childhood friend would betray me. I might be a villain originally, but I don't remember doing anything that would cause a capture target to focus on me to this degree.

But in other words, he's implying Keito is the kind of man who would betray me.

Tuvalu doesn't know Keito, he only knows him as an attribute holder, my childhood friend, and a commoner. He's only thinking of utility. Even if Tuvalu hadn't consciously mocked Keito, I still wouldn't forgive his words.

"Prince Runa, I apologize for making a racket. The sweets were delicious, thank you for the meal."

"Ah, yeah..."

I only smiled at Runa while apologizing and thanking him. I don't want to see Tuvalu any longer.

"Well then, please excuse me."

I could feel the nerves at the tip of the tip of my fingers stretched out.

My posture and stride, don't you collapse until I open the door and leave.

Perfectly, I gathered all the beauty of Mariabell. I determined to show not even a bit of weakness. Showing weakness, you think I'll show even the possibility it exists?

After leaving the student council room, I walked leisurely for a bit, but I realized my pace was quickening little by little and started running away. I hadn't decided where I was going but I was sure to go to where Keito was at this rate.

The me right now is surely making a horrible face.

A smile wanting to hurt someone, Mariabell herself. I definitely don't want to show Keito this face if met him.

I hate him.

He's a capture target, he's scary, I had many thoughts, but those were only a portion of them.

I, from the bottom of my heart, hate that man.

Chapter 78 About 70% of My Life

After declining the invitation to join the student council, I eventually decided to be part of the go home club.[1] I didn't want to carelessly join a club just to fit in. I can see the villainess flags being raised if I did.

In a way it's shameless but I'm not stupid enough to want to feel hurt. I'm terribly tired, especially mentally.

"Maria-chan, you're not going to eat...?"

"... I don't have much of an appetite."

"You've been like that for a while now, if you're feeling unwell you should return to your room."

"I'm fine. I just feel a little exhausted since it's gotten hotter."

It wasn't a lie. There was the school excursion incident and I picked a fight with the student council—that made my temperature change. My stamina, which had always been low, seemed to be at rock bottom.

"Yeah it's gotten hot suddenly. It's pleasant at school but I can't be indoors all the time."

Of course, the school rooms are cool. They don't have anything like air conditioning, but the rooms are always at a pleasant temperature. They don't get hot nor cold.

In this world, all scientific theory is supplemented with magic. The Magic Academy is one of the forefronts of such technology. After all, the future scientists and scholars are all gathered here.

And above all else, this school is where all the rich assets are gathered—you can buy state-of-the art technology with money.

"The long vacation is almost here so the number of parties is going to increase too..."

It's rare for Primella to sigh but I understood her feelings. Only Eru tilted her head questioningly.

It's almost the long vacation... Our so-called "summer vacation" will begin. I'm grateful for a vacation. I have been wishing and praying to be legally separated from the capture targets. I will be happy to no longer have to constantly worry about who, when, and where.

Nevertheless, when vacation comes, my work will increase. Parties. In other words, I'll have to participate in high society events.

"In this season, wearing a dress is rough too."

"I know right..."

As noble ladies, we are used to it since we've been preparing since we were young. The venue will be the same pleasant temperature as school. At first glance there isn't any problem, but most dresses have poor breathability.

Furthermore, the events I was exempt from when first entering the school will be added on top as well... Please, someone stop this.

"It seems like I'll be busier because I've made more friends too."

"That's true... I wonder if there will be things you have to do at the venue."

"I'd be able to enjoy myself just by being with Maria-chan though."

"It's hard being a noble lady huh."

Only Eru was acting like this was someone else's problem. Certainly, she is a commoner, not a noble lady, but she is also a student here, so she must have some general or extraordinary assets.

In the end, she is still a commoner, so she doesn't have any parties or the like... I'm jealous.

"But our vacation is long so we can go out and play on days that don't have a party!"

"That's true. Will you two be home for the whole break?"

"We're making our travel plans when I return home, although the destination has been decided!"

"Same here, looks like I'm going somewhere."

"I see... Maybe I should go home."

Come to think of it, I haven't been on a trip before.... I have been to my mother's house to show my face but that was inside the country. My father is busy all year round so it's rare for him to have a long enough break to go on a trip. In reality, it might be harder than I think.

My mother is the type to refuse to go out or on a trip. Me being myself, I just played with Keito all the time. And, my father won't take a vacation on his own unless we pester him to.

Honestly, almost all things can be done within our property. We can shop by calling a merchant, our garden is so large that there's no need to go to a park, and the rooms we use are on the same level as hotels, maybe even nicer. As guests we don't like temporary service, but rather people who have served us for a long time and understand our lifestyle patterns perfectly.

... Huh, is there a need to travel?

"Maria's house seems like the type to own a summer retreat, right?"

"I haven't heard or been to such a place but... I wonder if we do."

Well, there probably is one. A villa that's probably also a shelter if something happens.

But, so far I haven't been to one and I can't imagine my father taking a break... In the past when I took a day off, having someone pick up my work seemed to have been very difficult.[2]

"Right now, I have nothing decided so if you like please visit me."

"Really? I want to go!"

"Then, when my plans are decided, I'll contact you!"

“If I end up going somewhere, I’ll let you two know too.”

There are two ways to contact someone in this world. One is by phone and the other is by letter. However, generally people use letters—there are many houses that don’t have a phone. It’s... not a high class item but most people are satisfied with letters. Our house has one, but we rarely use it.

It’s not that the mail system is developed. Actually, mailmen don’t exist.

It’s just, in this world, the mailboxes have a simple transfer magic enchanted on them. It’s a non-attribute spell so it’s easy to use. So, handwritten letters are delivered at the same speed as e-mails. Depending on your magic power, the number of times you can use it is different but that’s plenty useful isn’t it? As expected of a magical world, I’m blown away by the convenience.

That’s why there are two mailboxes in each house, one for receiving and one for sending. If you accidentally put your letter in the receive one it’ll never come back, so be careful. By the way, there’s no need to write an address, but you do need to know approximately where the recipient lives.

“I wanted to see your home, Maria-chan. I’ve been to Eru-chan’s house many times after all.”

“Me too. I can’t imagine a majestic mansion that matches you.”

“Well, you are childhood friends. It looks like you have some expectations, but I don’t think it’s particularly unusual?”

“You think that because it’s where you were born and raised, but a Duke’s household can’t have the same sense of values as me right?”

Well... I see, that’s true. I should say, when I was born I also thought, “it’s too vast.”

I got used to it somehow or another, but if you look at it normally, maybe just its size is unusual enough. The inside is quite normal.... No it’s not. My standard is that it’s not showy, to a certain degree.

“After all, Keito lives there too right? Just based on that, it must be big.”

“Come to think of it, Keito-san is going to go home too right?”

“I haven’t asked but probably.”

I wonder if Keito will return, I bet he will. Uncle[3] probably wants to see him since it’s been so long, and Keito is probably worried too. They were separated suddenly after living together just the two of them for such a long time after all.

The first thing Keito did after having to enroll in the academy was apologize to Uncle.

I did get him involved. Perhaps I was the cause of Keito’s attribute being decided. Uncle’s treasured only son; it appears as if I’ve stolen his family.

I’m sorry. Uncle had said with his head lowered towards me, “Thank you. Thanks to you, Keito’s world will expand with this wonderful experience.”

For a father, his son's growth makes him happy even if it's not by his own hands. This is parental love beyond my understanding, a father's feeling that I will never understand in my life.

Even though normally Uncle is so simple-minded that it makes Keito seem like the grown-up, Uncle is still an adult. I remember thinking, "he really is a dad." At the time, Keito's secretly laughing face was child-like as usual.

"Do you think I should send my things with Keito?"

"You live in the same house so why not?"

Actually, we live on the same property, okay. Saying like that sounds like we live together.

I have my own room at home so there isn't much of a need to bring things home but... I want to put away the things I haven't used all these months.

In Keito's case, he brought all of his clothes, so he probably has a lot of luggage... He probably only left his overalls for gardening training there.

I'll discuss with Keito. If he's sending things over then I'll have it sent with my things.

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So, after school I immediately went to the back gardens where Keito was.

He was in the midst of his acclaimed club activities though. There weren't many members and their policy is to let members grow whatever they like. Thanks to that, no one will say anything even if I go in. If I'm clumsy, it won't be noticed.

I am prohibited from places like the greenhouse, something about things being delicate there. Let's not dwell on the fact that our school has facilities like a greenhouse, let's get used to it.

"Keitooo, do you have time now?"

"Aah, wait a bit."

"Okay."

His hands and clothes are already browned from getting dirt on them. The front of the flower bed was full of irises, they were not yet bloomed and just planted.

Usually Keito would be tending to one thing or another so this was rare.

I sat on a nearby bench and waited a few minutes. After a bit, as he said, Keito sat down next to me while removing his work gloves.

"Sorry, were you busy?"

"No, don't worry. There's someone who wants to use this flower bed over the break so I'm just preparing it."

Oh, how timely. As expected, when a break draws near, those types of topics come up.

"So that means, you're going home, too right?"

“Yeah. I’m worried about my old man and I want to visit my mom’s grave.”

It seems like Keito’s mom was originally a gardener at our house along with Uncle. She passed away before I was born so I’ve only seen her in pictures but, she resembled Keito and was beautiful... I guess in this case, it’s Keito who resembles her.

“Our place is probably a mess by now so first thing I’ll have to clean.”

“Even though he can clean...”

I remembered the time when we were young, Keito’s cold had gotten worse. Uncle was attentive towards cleaning to the point where clothes and tableware were always pristine, and dust was nowhere to be found. He even did all that while easily caring for the sickly Keito... However, for some reason the floor fell into ruins.

Even though Uncle can create a beautiful garden by himself skillfully with tools—he has good taste too. He can cook properly, do laundry, and dust, but when it comes to putting things away and tidying up, he can’t do it for some strange reason.

It’s a mystery why he can’t do that.

“Then, can we send our things together? Because I don’t have much, just some pictures and such.”

“Ah, that’s fine. Then the next time you’re free, bring it to my dorm.”

“Okaay!”

Okay, now our business is done. Even though I was thinking of running away so that I wouldn’t be a nuisance to his club activities any longer, for some reason Keito was staring at me intently and showed no signs of getting up.

Eh, is there something on my face? Or, there’s seaweed in my teeth... I didn’t eat any though.

“... Is that it?”

“Eeh...?”

“Something happened is what my sixth sense is telling me.”

I tilted my head to indicate that I didn’t know what he was talking about but if I don’t answer then I’ll probably be found out.

Primella and Eru exposed my declining appetite but I had planned to act the same as always in front of Keito.

How did he know, am I that easy to read?

Or, is this the power of childhood friends who have been together for more than half their lives?

“Can’t you see nothing’s wrong?”

“Okay, since you don’t want to say.”

“Really, I don’t think anything’s wrong.”

“My sixth sense is accurate, especially when it concerns Maria.”

“You’re too confident...”

It’s vexing but, he hit the bullseye. This guy...

Precisely because of what the problem is, I don’t want to tell Keito but, he most likely won’t ask me. He’s familiar with me when I really don’t want to do something or when I’m troubled.

“... Nothing’s wrong, I’m fine.”

“Is that so, then I won’t ask.”

See, like I said, he doesn’t force information out. I wonder if he’ll get mad if I say, “even though you used to be so curious!”

Thanks to his curiosity, I’m the way I am now.

I won’t believe Tuvalu’s words at all. I definitely don’t believe that something like Keito using me would happen, it’s impossible. But, if it were to happen...

I would surely happily cooperate with him.

“Then, I’m going to go back.”

“Ah, yeah. Thanks. See you.”[4]

“Mhm.”

With a wave, Keito returned to his club activities.

It’s going to be the first long vacation after many months, but there are too many things to do that I feel like my sense of time is getting weird. It feels like the entrance ceremony was yesterday, but I already can’t remember the feelings of nervousness and oppressive dread I had felt.

There was the incident with Saashia too, even though I tried to avoid him so much...

We sit next to each other and we even did a test of courage together... If my baby-self heard about this then she’d probably faint. And, she’d be bewildered by the me who is used to such things and keeps moving forward.

“... Well, I won’t have to meet them for a while after this.”

Even if I think about it, there’s no point.

Since I’m not part of a club, there’s nothing for me to do if I remain in the school. I’ll go back to my room and collect the things I’m going to entrust to Keito.

On this day when I gathered my things and gave them to Keito, it was about one month from break. Then, our long vacation, summer vacation, began.

[1] In Japan, if you’re not in a club then you’re automatically part of the “going home” club. It’s not an actual club.

[2] She's talking about her past life's job.

[3] She calls Keito's dad "oji-san" which can be used for close family friends similar to Uncle in English. He's not actually her uncle.

[4] She says "itterashai" which usually means something along the lines of "have a safe trip", but she's not saying it in that way here, so I changed it.

Chapter 79 Still Too Early For Girls' Talk

It has been several months since I entered this school— several months of living in the dorms. Time passed in a blink of an eye, but maybe I had just prepared myself well.

“As expected, my home is the best~” I mumbled. I sprawled out on my bed and lost consciousness as soon as I got home.

The dorms are very convenient and leave nothing to be desired. I have no complaints about the food either; meals are delicious and the nutritional balance is perfect. I’m quite partial to dorm life but it’s just no match for my own home.

My kind parents are here and servants that are like family are too. The cooking that I’ve been familiar with since I was young gives me a feeling of comfort, unlike the dorm’s food. Just as Keito had said before vacation started, his house was a mess—as if a storm had passed through—and he worked hard to tidy up with his dad while grumbling out complaints.

It’s been only 10 days since my vacation began, but the days were peaceful, just like they were before I entered the academy and met the capture targets.

If I have a complaint, it’s the frequency of which I have to attend parties, but Primella is often there with me so it’s not much of a problem for the time being.

Just yesterday at a meeting for nobles, I enjoyed chatting. At that time, an appointment was made for my greatest wish.

“Maria-chan, it’s your friends!”

“Yes, you can let them in!”

Hearing my mother from my room, I checked myself checked my appearance and then opened the door. I normally look neat... Well, I had help cleaning up my appearance, so I knew it wasn’t a problem, but I couldn’t help being nervous.

“Welcome you two. I’m glad you came.”

“Good day to you, Maria-chan.”

“Excuse my intrusion~”

After all, today was the first day I had ever invited female friends to my house. I almost never invited Keito to my room. But, should I even group him with my friends? “Childhood friends” is a category higher than friends after all.

“Well then, relax and enjoy.”

“Thank you, mother.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you.”

After saying farewell to my mother, Primella and Eru entered my room and reacted as expected.

“Huge!!”

Eru’s offhand remark put me in a nostalgic mood. I also thought that in the past... Even now I often questioned if my room is too large. Though, compared with the size of my house, I have come to think that the size is proper—perhaps I’m getting influenced.

“I prepared some black tea, please sit.”

A little while ago, Ann had prepared a tea set. Maybe it’s because of my room’s interior, but rather than a girl’s only party, it seemed like we were having a tea party. Well, that’s not wrong but... I just wanted to play with my friends, but now it feels pretentious.

“Still, this sure is an amazing house. It surpassed my imagination. Or rather, it blew it away.”

“But it suits Maria-chan.”

“Ah, I thought so too. It fits her gorgeous image perfectly.”

“N-not at all, though it doesn’t feel like I’m getting praised.”

I know very well that my gaudy face suits a stately mansion like this. After all, when I returned, I was immediately told that I’ve “become more like the head of the house.” Even though it’s only been several months since I was gone!

A child’s development sure is amazing~ I do love my father, so my reaction looked a little mixed. It’s not that I hate it but, the closer I get to that perfect form, the more mixed feelings I have.

“Y’know, Maria’s room is just as I imagined! It’s simple and not flashy but feels nice.”

“Simple is cute~”

It’s because of Mariabell’s bad example of what not to do that my design is simple. My room and my clothes prioritize functionality.

People enter and exit places like the hallway, parlor room, and my father’s study regularly so they’re decorated with a look suitable of a noble’s dignity. But, my room is only seen by the servants and my friends.

“I thought that visiting Maria’s house would make me see her nobleness in a new light but... Yea, Maria is Maria.”

“On the contrary, she tries harder to seem like a Lady at school.”

At least let me relax in my own house, or else I’ll get tired.

“But, at parties, Maria-chan looks really dignified and pretty you know! It’s a different feeling from her at school~ she was the center of attention you know.”

“Eh, sorry, I have no memory of such a thing.”

Center of attention? What do you mean, I don’t know of such a thing happening, are you talking about a different person?

Primella seemed to be enjoying my earnest confusion. What was different? We were supposed to be in the same place, but maybe the dimension got distorted?

Primella's eyes were sparkling and a little vacant. Primella, please return to us.

"Maria-chan is a beauty, she doesn't act arrogant, and her manners and greetings are perfect... When she's standing silently, she looks like a painting."

"Aa... That's true, her face and gestures *are* beautiful too."

This is torture. Praising me this much... How much money did you receive?

No wait, Eru's praise was a little questionable with the way she emphasized "my face and gestures *are*"... The way she said it sounds like my insides are no good, not that I deny it.

"Her greetings are so formal and reserved that it makes it hard to talk to her though."

"How rude!"

Lifting me up then dropping me like this, when did your statements become like that! Who indoctrinated you guys? Who did this to my oasis?

"It's because your manners are too perfect, so you seem like a goody two shoes."

"That... I can't deny it."

My manners, skills, and knowledge are all things I learned from my observation of Mariabell as a role model and then fixed. I don't have much experience, but I use my status to make it seem like I do.

Depending on where or how I use my status, it might seem like I don't have enough experience though.

"Honestly, it's tiring so I don't like putting on airs. I'm happy if Primella will chat with me."

"Me too. Those kinds of showy events... mentally tire you."

Although Mariabell had loved parties and the like, they don't suit someone like me. Attending those kinds of events is a responsibility of a noble lady so I can't say that I don't want to go but, I have absolutely no intention of going out of my way to participate.

"We'll have to endure until school starts again."

Well, for me, parties are way safer than school. There are too many capture targets there. My personal demons.

There is a possibility of meeting the three of them at a party but I have the ultimate shield called my father. For example, even if they try to talk with me, as long as my father is there, they can't make any careless remarks. At least, that one guy who always tries to show off his standing can't.

"Come to think of it, Maria-chan, Heine-chan said 'thank you'."

"Heine....?"

Who? Someone who Primella and I would both know would be a classmate but I'm sorry to say that I have had extremely little interactions with my classmates. I don't want to know the reason why, but it's probably because my face is scary.

"She said if I mentioned the test of courage pairs during the school excursion you would know but..."

"Aaaaah, that girl! I got it."

"Thanks to you, they're heading towards a good course. She was very happy. It seems like she was too shy to say it directly."

"Fufu, that's good. Will you tell her it was my pleasure?"

"Okay, got it."

I see, it went well. Her Suspension Bridge effect strategy. I envy her sweet adolescence, but I'm happy she had good results.

Heine-chan, may you be happy with your fiancé for many years to come.

"Is this about her progress with Towa?"

"Seems like it because she's been brooding over various things."

"You two knew?"

"Heine-chan is in the handicrafts club after all."

"And, her fiancé is in the track and field club. Heine is always worrying about Towa."

My my, what a small world—is what I'd like to say but if you're a student at school this is normal maybe. I'm the only one with an extremely small world. Primella and Eru are both in clubs so I'm sure they have many friends.

"I can't imagine having something like a fiancé at all."

"Me too. I'm not a noble so there's no plans to arrange for one."

"I don't know anything about a fiancé, let alone love."

What's this? It's a girl's conversation. This is girls' talk. Unfortunately, it seems that not one of us has something of substance to say.

If only if there were a girl who had a fiancé or a first love here. At our age, this might be a normal thing though, I don't know.

To be honest, I can't imagine myself liking anyone else like that.

I have personally witnessed Mariabell's failures. She viewed love as a stepping stone towards happiness so I can't think of it as something that will bring happiness.

"Me too, I have no idea at all."

"Right... Right now, talking with Maria-chan and Eru-chan just the three of us is more fun."

“We have no interest in boys huh.”

The two of them laughing looked dazzling.

Now, I have friends. That’s already plenty of a miracle for me. Something like love is just a dream within a dream and having a fiancé is a matter for the far future. I do long for a happy love but if I wish for anything more, it feels like both will disappear.

I felt like if this moment, now, continued forever, that would be nice.

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It was the time when the sky was dyed red by the sunset.

Until my mother called for us, we hadn’t noticed the color of the light shining into my room because we were so absorbed in our chatting.

Even though we take the same lessons in the same classroom and occasionally spend time together during breaks and days off, we didn’t run out of things to talk about. When we noticed, the sweets and tea had run out.

“I had fun today, please come again.”

“Thank you for having us. The sweets and tea were delicious.”

“Thanks for having us until so late.”

“I’ll contact you both again.”

“Yes! Ah, I’ll send you a souvenir.”

“Me too.”

“Okay, I look forward to it.”

I sent them off at the gate where a carriage came to pick them up. I then absentmindedly remembered my complete lack of plans in the future.

The two of them have plans to travel while I have nothing special planned. Most likely, my vacation will end with me playing with Keito as usual at this rate.

I’m not particularly discontent with that and I’m looking forward to the promised souvenirs.

“Welcome home, Maria-chan.”

“Mother, did something happen?”

I only went to the gate but our grounds are so large that it takes a good amount of time to do just that. After seeing Primella and Eru off at the entrance, I was thinking of returning to my room. Were you waiting for me... sorry mother. I have a bad premonition.

“There’s a letter for you, Maria-chan.”

“A letter?”

With this timing, the letter couldn't be from Primella or Eru. We were together just now after all. It's a little sad to say but, besides those two, I have no idea who it could be from. Well, Keito and I are close enough to exchange letters but we live on the same property so it would be a waste of resources to, right?

Then... Who? I could only think of someone I hate.

Heart pounding, I took the letter and checked the sender. Written in beautiful letters, was a name beyond my expectations.

“Neriel....?”

Note: ~~I'm not sure what to translate Nerieru (ネリエル) as. I googled the name and a Bleach character comes up. I didn't think Niel made sense but should I stick to Niel? He's the shut-in capture target that's now friends with Maria and Keito.~~

Edit: Changed Nerieru to Neriel

Chapter 80 Children Grow Up

Dense trees, a refreshing breeze, and a villa with a pool.

Presently, I am at a summer retreat that looks like it came out of a painting. However, it's not property of the Tempest family. My mother and father didn't come. This villa is privately owned by the eldest son of the Juliano family, Rave—it's not property of the Juliano family.

It all started a couple of days ago when a letter for me from Neriell arrived.

There were a lot of pleasantries in the letter, but to summarize, it was an invitation to come to this villa to play.

His siblings were worried that if their parents were there, they would just wear out Neriell's mind. Apparently, during this season, Rave shelters his little brother in his villa. I don't know what happened that made him say he is "sheltering Neriell from his parents," but he invited me without informing me of the location to avoid being noticed by his parents. So, I understand what he means by "shelter."

The only other people at the villa are an attendant and escort that Neriell trusts, to ease their parents' mind and keep them happy.

Since Keito and I both finally got to return from dorm life, they invited us to go together. He also said that they would prepare everything we'd need over there so just "bring yourselves." Isn't Rave-sama pulling too many strings for his little brother's sake... Ah, but he was the type of person to create false charges for the sake of his little brother. It was Mariabell getting her just desserts but I wonder if that's just how nobles drive someone away?

After this and that, Keito and I arrived at the villa.

It's been quite a while since I've seen Neriell, huh... Once I started preparing to enter the academy, I was so busy that we stopped having tea parties.

"Both of you, Welcome.....!"

"..... Neriell?"

"Ah.... Yes, it's been a while."

Yep, that smile that emits a healing aura is Neriell's. But, the impression of Neriell in my memory is very, very different.

His hair, which had been heavy before, was now quite a bit shorter, though it still covered his eyes a little. It wasn't as much of a problem as before. Actually, Keito's hair is longer now. Before, the combination of his glasses and long hair made him look gloomy but now his ambience has changed quite a lot.

"You cut your hair; it suits you."

"T... Thank you. It's just a little shorter but has my impression changed?"

“Yes, I can see your eyes more than before. It makes me happy!”

This is like a girls’ conversation... Well, Neriél’s eyes are cute so it doesn’t feel out of place.

Ultimately, I’d like to cut his hair so it’s not covering his eyes at all but... he still hasn’t entered middle school yet so maybe it’s too soon for an image change.

“You two, if you’re going to talk then do it inside. If we leave the door open, bugs will get in.”

“Ah... You’re right. Come in, your luggage is in your room already.”

Nature is heaven for insects, after all.

At Neriél’s encouraging we entered. It was just one step in but I felt a pleasant cool breeze wrapping my body.

Even if there was a breeze outside, the sun was still bright, so of course being inside was much cooler.

“I’ll wait in the living room, okay?”

Keito and I followed the attendant to the rooms they prepared for us. Getting a room separately doesn’t surprise me anymore but... being next door neighbors with Keito is a little fresh. After all, we are in different dorms and different years. We don’t even attend the same events.

“I’ll wait for you, so get changed.”

“Okay, thanks.”

My traveling clothes are cute but I don’t feel relaxed in them. As I entered the room, it wasn’t its size but its closet that I reacted most strongly to.

It was crammed full of clothes. I could live here as long as I wanted and never run out. I was completely provided for on one wall and of course complete with anything a women could need.

The Juliano house was supposed to only have sons.... What did they do to get this many feminine products?

“....O-oh well.”

There not even an ounce in trouble over money. If I think too hard then I’ll probably be tormented by guilty feelings. Thinking about this situation can wait. Sorry for keeping you, Keito.

I carelessly chose an elegant dress with little accessories and a long cardigan then left my room.

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“Neriél, thanks for waiting.”

“Not at all. Ah, the clothes... did they suite your tastes?”

“Yes, there were so many choices that I didn’t know what to pick.”

“There aren’t any women in our house besides mother so.... My brothers were very enthusiastic.”

“All of them were very cute.”

“Ah... you can take the ones you like home, if you’d like... We can’t use them at home and my brothers will be pleased.”

“Oh, that’s nice. Then, later I’ll have to examine them carefully.”

Is it better if I restrain myself a little? Women’s clothes are useless in a house of men, and even if they gave the clothes to their lover, she wouldn’t be pleased to receive something picked out for another woman, right? No matter how old she was, even if she were a girl in her teens, women are naturally women.

“We also prepared a lot of clothes for you, Keito-kun. So if you’d like, come look later.”

“For me?”

“You have a different style than me so... It seemed like it’d be fun.”

“Aa... Well I guess.”

It seemed like Neriell has become someone else’s little brother. I knew girls liked to play dress up with children, but it looks like boys aren’t so different either.

In Neriell’s case, he’s always been someone’s precious little brother. Keito is older than us so if Neriell views him as an older brother he’ll still be a child. Since Keito has become friends with Neriell, he wants to spoil him... maybe? I’ve never had siblings so I don’t understand this sort of topic.

“I also want to see later. Keito only ever wears things like overalls.”

“Because it’s easier to work in.”

“Boring.”

“Even if you want me to be interested in men’s clothes, it’s bothersome for me.”

“Ahaha, you’ll be compared to women, huh.”

Neriell’s expression was bright and not particularly perplexed. Good, his impression had changed, but he was fundamentally afraid of strangers... I thought we were getting along well but what if in half a year his suspicious behavior returned? What would I do?

But, it looks like my worries were needless anxiety. When we met, I thought I saw a shred of nervousness but it looks like it was just my imagination.

I say it’s worrying, but I simply wasn’t able to trust Neriell... I should do some reflection. While I’ve just been a worrywart, Neriell has been pulling himself together, probably.

“But, when I heard Keito-kun was also going to the academy, I was surprised.”

“That... Me too.”

“Me too, you know. Even though I just wanted to make him come see me off no matter what, I never thought we’d be going together.”

Even if Keito had stayed behind, he would have had training so he wouldn’t be able to have tea parties with Neriell anyway. There’s no way he thought his training would be interrupted because he had to go to the academy with me... Really, you never know what will happen in life. There’s definitely no one who can say this remark with more persuasiveness than me!

“I’ll be entering next year but... when I think that you two will be there, my unease turns into anticipation!”

“Oh, that makes me happy. I’ve been looking forward to you coming.”

From the bottom of my heart, I’m anticipating it. Because even though we’ll be in different years, it’s a friend attending the same school.

However... I do have some mixed feelings. The capture targets will be on the same grounds in full force. Grey-sensei being in the high school section was my only relief.

Well, at this point, even if Neriell joins, I don’t think my dangers will change. As long as Tuvalu is around, regardless of whether the others are gathered or not, there are landmines scattered everywhere.

“Neriell, when you enter the school, I’ll introduce you to my friends. They also know Keito too.”

“Aah, Eru-chan and Primella-chan?”

“Yes. It’s best if we have some common acquaintances right?”

For me, if my friends knew each other, it would be convenient if something happened... Though if you ask me what, it’s difficult to say concretely. Like maybe an emergency contact? Even if they don’t become friends, there’s no harm in being acquaintances.

I introduced Keito to them when they came to visit. Hopefully I’ll get an opportunity to introduce Neriell too.

“Come to think of it, I’ve never met any of your friends before, Keito.”

“Are you implying I have none?”

“Well, whenever I see you, you’re always alone.”

“Cause you’re coming during my club. I talk normally with others in class.”

Is that so? I thought he’d be alone by choice... Now that I think about it, Keito has experienced elementary school so he’s far more used to making friends than me.

“Well, I don’t deny that I do things alone often.”

“I know. Veeery well.”

How many years do you think we've been together? And I can't talk about other people being alone... Could it be, did I influence Keito? No, he originally had the makings of a loner.

"Even so, I have to say, when there are a lot of boys around, they're really noisy."

I don't have anything I can comment on about the differences between men and women but... For me, Keito's year is full of evil spirits, so if I can get through the years without getting involved with them, I'll be happy. Having Eru and Primella is enough for me.

"It looks like the two of you made new friends."

"Yes. Primella is from a baron house so you might meet her at a party."

I heard from Rave-sama that Neriell has been skipping parties less lately. I had received an incredibly formal letter from him. Don't tell him I was troubled from receiving so many intense and overly formal thanks in one letter.

However, it seems that Neriell can't talk actively yet, the most he can handle now is a little bit of basic conversation when he's talked to. He is a former social recluse so this is plenty of progress.

"Yea, but..."

".....?"

"Your friends, what kind of people are they?"

".... They're, really good girls."

For a split second, it looked like Neriell's face was cloudy but... his smile immediately returned. I could feel his growth for being able to let a topic drop.

Maybe the dark aura I felt was my misunderstanding.

Neriell continued to listen to me brag about Primella and Eru without making an unhappy face. Eventually I noticed the view outside had become pitch black.

.... It wasn't just me talking like a machine gun, okay? Keito and Neriell also talked properly. It wasn't a one-sided conversation. I'm reiterating just in case, got it?

Chapter 81 I Want to Try Comparing

I am Neriell. I like her voice.

I like the way her eyes droop when she laughs.

I like when her adult-like tone crumbles for just an instant.

There are many other things I like, like her soft hair, the sparkle in her eyes when she sees macarons, the warm hand she holds out to me.

There are so many things I like about Maria-chan that I can't name them as fast as I can think of them.

But I, I don't know what these feelings are.

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The one to think of the plan to invite Maria-chan and Keito to the villa was Rave-oniisama. Normally, father and the others are at my home so I can't invite people over, but every year, the time I go to my brother's villa overlaps with the academy's long vacation.

I'm always visiting them, so occasionally I should be the host instead.

It was fine for them to stay at my brother's villa but I would have to prepare the necessities. In the end, I relied on my brother for everything. Despite not being organized by me, the reply to the invitation letter from Maria-chan and Keito said "We'd be happy to, we're looking forward to it"

I was happy. Of course it was because it had been so long but simply the thought of being with them made me so happy. I'm just happy when I can be with them.

It's not like we've been separated for many years, nor was it a long enough period of time where people would change a lot. I haven't grown much either.

I thought it would be good to change a little bit so I tried cutting my bangs, but in the end I was worried about being looked at at parties, so I started growing it again.

What am I doing? Why am I like this? I thought I changed a little thanks to Maria-chan but when I'm alone I quickly wither away.

Until Maria-chan came, I was wavering and pondering.

"You cut your hair; it suits you."

With just a few words, just that, my heart cleared up.

A happy smile, my favorite Maria-chan expression.

I think becoming happy is like this. Every time I see Maria-chan, I feel like I can get stronger. Every time I meet Maria-chan it's always like this. No, even when we don't meet, I am thinking about Maria-chan.

I think things like “I want her to taste these delicious sweets.” “This cute dress would suit Maria-chan.” “I wonder if Maria-chan would like this pretty flower?”

My brothers told me that whenever I talk to them, I always talk about Maria-chan.

“Neriel, you really like Maria-sama.”

Abruptly, clearly, I felt like reality was thrust before my eyes.

I like Maria-chan, that is certainly true. I have fun, it’s pleasant, I’m happy. I always want to be together. When she entered the academy, even though I knew I would be joining her in a year, I was lonely.

But, that’s something I can say about Keito-kun too.

Maria-chan introduced me to him. He’s a friend who is older than me and rarely smiles but is calm and kind. When I’m with him I can feel relieved. Like when I’m with my older brothers.

It’s not only Maria-chan, Keito-kun is also a person I love and treasure.

But why? Why is it that when I equate Maria-chan and Keito-kun, I feel unease?

I like them about the same, but it’s a little different.

I treasure them about the same, but just by a little bit, it’s different.

But, I don’t know what the difference is. All I know is when I compare my two friends, their conditions are too different. A boy and a girl. Their ages are different too. And, originally, Keito-kun was introduced to me by Maria-chan.

I wonder if these differences are obvious?

Difference in when we met? Or is it just because Maria-chan was the one who introduced me to Keito-kun?

“Neriel, when you enter the school, I’ll introduce you to my friends.”

From those words, I realized what the thumping and creaking of my heart was. It was what I’ve been feeling since long ago. It was the feeling of shame when I realized my worthlessness from being compared to my brothers.

Maria-chan’s world is expanding whereas I don’t even understand my own feelings.

I somehow smiled so that Maria-chan, who was talking happily, wouldn’t notice. After that, her stories about academy gradually stopped registering in my mind.

Only her smile was clear in my mind.

“.... I am...”

I like Maria-chan. That is definitely not a lie. It’s not an overstatement to say that Maria-chan began my world.

But, those feelings are not enough. I feel that saying I like her isn't enough to express my feelings.

Even though the feelings that I have for her should be the same as what I feel towards my brothers and Keito-kun.

Even though they should be the same, they are completely different.

"Why is it, I wonder."

I wonder what is different? They're my feelings, yet I don't understand them at all.

Is it because she's not family? She's not a boy?

Is it because she's my first friend that she is this special?

The feelings I have for Maria-chan, do they really only apply to her?

I wonder if everyone understands. The types of feelings people have for each other, how do people come to know them? Do they compare each other, choose a feeling, and then finally understand? If so, then I don't have the important "target to compare to."

Is she special because I compare her? Is she special because she can't be compared? Either way, the person I am knows nothing and can't do anything.

In the end, I stayed as is and didn't understand myself.

Of course. The one who expanded my world wasn't me, but Maria-chan after all.

"..... Neriell?"

"Ah...."

For a moment, I thought it was an illusion. I thought too much and my heart showed me a hallucination.

"What's wrong? You didn't turn on the lamp...."

She's probably coming from a bath. She was wearing clothes that were even more comfortable than what she wore in the afternoon, suitable for sleeping in, a top and bottom set. Probably one of the things my brother chose.

Her figure was too good and too realistic to be an illusion. It didn't take long for me to realize it was the real person.

"Were you looking at the moon?"

The living room was connected to the garden by one window. The moon today was beautiful and the only light needed. It's probably thanks to that that Maria-chan came to that conclusion from my face.

Maria-chan approached me and stood next to me to watch the sky. The same way I was.

"You really can see its beauty in the middle of nature. It looks like it'll fall."

“Fufu.” She laughed. Her face was a little higher than mine. Of course I, who was short even within my own year, would be shorter than Maria-chan who was older than me. I saw even that as proof that the distance between us had grown.

“I’m... no good huh.”

“Eh....?”

“No good at all... Even though I thought I had grown.”

I thought, surely I had changed a little right? I can go outside, I cut my hair, before I wouldn’t have imagined this.

Surely it was a wonderful thing to expand my narrow world.

But, now I don’t know what to do from hereon.

Where do I head to? If I move forward, is it the correct path? Is this pace good? Am I slow? Is it better if I move faster?

Moving step by step, I can’t see the destination. When I step out, I can’t see the end. It terrifies me and I immediately end up returning.

I want to catch up to her who is moving forward, but her back keeps getting further and further away from my reach.

“Even though I have to work hard to make up for the parts I’ve fallen behind in.”

I closed myself off from the world. The responsibility is mine, of course I have to work hard to make up for it.

“The only one thinking like that, might just be you, though?”

“Eh....?”

“Growing up is something you don’t notice about yourself.”

The meaning of her words barely registered. Surely she doesn’t understand. It wasn’t a deep thought. It didn’t have the intention to console me. She just said what she thought.

And, her behavior that is always natural for her always change me.

“Maria, Neriell... What are you guys doing?”

“Keito!”

“You guys were late so I came to get you.”

Keito-kun, like Maria-chan, looked like he had just gotten out of a bath. But somehow, the clothes didn’t suit him. It’s probably because my brothers selected it.

“Neriell, let’s play in my room,” Keito said.

“Eh, um...”

“Maria came to find you because she said she wanted to play cards...”

“The moon was so beautiful so I accidentally...”

“Yeah yeah....”

“Then, let’s go, Neriell!”

The hand that reached out for me was the same one from before. Just as before, Maria-chan will turn around and reach out her hand for me, however far apart we are.

It was a nice sensation. It made me want to depend on her. Although in reality I am depending on her.

Then, I knew there was an answer I could not comprehend.

“.... Yeah, let’s go. I’m good at cards, you know.”

“The weakest by far is Maria. Right? Her emotions immediately show on her face, after all.”

“No! I can beat mother!”

“I was talking about the three of us.”

I am Neriell. I like her voice. I like the way her eyes droop when she laughs. I like when her adult-like tone crumbles for just an instant. Her sparkling eyes when she sees sweets, her warm hand, her tomboy-like qualities. I like all of her.

There are so many things I like about Maria-chan.

But, I don’t know what those feelings are.

That’s why, I want to know.

These feelings, what special feeling are they connected to. I hope... It would be nice if these feelings are only for her.

It would be nice if Maria-chan were my special beloved person.

Chapter 82 A Variety of Impossible Games

One night and two days was surprisingly short. The three of us played cards all night and in the blink of an eye, the sun had risen. I'll keep the outcome of the games a secret. I'll say that my memory flew away since I was so excited all night long.

I've never won against Keito before but I never thought I wouldn't win against Neriél either... I thought he would definitely be like me: someone who shows their emotions easily on their face!

"I really was the weakest one by far."

"Maria-chan is honest after all..."

"Thanks..."

But you know, Neriél... Kindness can hurt people too you know. Emotional pain.

"Thank you for having us over. I had a lot of fun."

"Me too! It's been so long since I've seen the two of you so I was really happy."

"Our next vacation, I'll invite you to my house okay?"

"Yes!"

Our next vacation is... When was it again? It will probably be something like a winter vacation, I don't think we have something like a fall vacation.

Which means, it will be around another half a year until I can see Neriél again. There will probably be a couple more opportunities for me to go home, but not enough time to play with Neriél. After winter vacation, Neriél will enter the academy too. Fortunately, he'll be in the same dorm as me!

When I think like that, there's no need to feel sad or anything.

"Then, see you."

"Yes, see you."

"Thanks for having us!"

Just like when we came, we left empty-handed. It didn't feel like we had stayed a night. It feels like we just played for a couple of hours and then left. In reality, more than 24 hours had passed. It's easy to lose your sense of time.

After waving goodbye to Neriél, we departed from the villa.

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"I'm home!"

"Welcome home. Did you have fun?"

"Yes, a lot of fun!"

Only my mother was there to greet me. My father's default state is being busy. I know it's amazing for him to even be able to eat dinner with us, so I won't complain.

"After you change, let's eat dinner, okay?"

"Yes."

"A letter and a package for you arrived. I left it in your room."

"A package... okay."

It's probably a souvenir from Primella or Eru. I didn't think it would come right when I was out. I'll have to send a thank you letter later.

When I entered my room, there was a package wrapped up nicely on the table. You couldn't miss it.

I wanted to open it immediately but then I'd be keeping my mother waiting for dinner. Also, I was hungry.

I quickly changed out of my clothes. I'll leave my dirty clothes to Ann. In the beginning, I had searched for a washing machine, thinking it was common sense. You know, it's hard to let someone else pick up your clothes that you've just taken off.

"Thank you for waiting."

"Welcome home, Maria."

"I'm home, father."

When I got to the dining room, my father and mother were already sitting down. My father, who was smiling and welcoming me home, really was a dreadfully handsome man. I suspect he is a teen parent, even though he is my own parent.

"Did Neriell-kun seem well?"

"Yes! I'm thinking of inviting him here next time."

"Of course. It's been a long time, I want to see him too."

Although she said that, my mother doesn't actively converse with my friends. My mother simply watches over me and my friends from a distance. Although, she could pass as my older sister and join us.

When Primella and Eru first saw my mother, I was a little bothered. If our eye colors weren't the same, misgivings that she was my step-mother might have surfaced. Even though I introduced her as my real mother... although, it is true that as I've matured, my traits that were similar to my mother's, which were already few, were disappearing even more. Ultimately, besides my eye color I will completely change into my father... even though I originally didn't resemble him much!

"Let me know when he will come. I want to make some sweets."

“Waa, I’m looking forward to that. Though, it won’t be until our next vacation, which is a long time away.”

My mother’s sweets are my favorite food. There’s a permanent chef at our house, so my mother’s home cooking always came in the form of sweets. She makes ones that don’t really appear at parties too. I’m glad I don’t get fat easily.

After dinner, I took a bath and then returned to my room wrapped up in my pajamas.

Until I saw the package on my table, I had completely forgotten about it. I thought it would be safe to send a thank you letter tomorrow morning, it’s about time for bed after all.

“Ah, yep, it’s from Primella.”

The name on the card stuck to the package was as I expected. I was thinking it might be Eru’s, but it was Primella’s after all.

The small card was crammed with where she went and what she did. Just by reading it I could tell she had a lot of fun. It seems like the souvenir she sent me was the region’s traditional accessory.

It works like an amulet against evil, apparently. When the new semester starts, I think I’ll wear it every day. Truly thank you, Primella. You sent me something I really needed... The villa wasn’t selling any souvenirs, I’m sorry I don’t have anything to give you in return.

“Hm? This is...”

Next to the souvenir was a white envelope with my name on it, but no sender name. I initially thought it was from Primella but her package came with a card so I concluded that it wasn’t.

Thinking it was from Eru, I opened it carelessly.

“.... Hah?”

Involuntarily, my voice slipped out. Confusion passed through me, among various other feelings, and I felt like I was frozen.

My hand froze and the card slipped and fell to the ground. What was written on it was a dream-like reality. Although rather than a dream, it’s more accurate to call it a nightmare.

The sender wanted to talk with me in three days at a certain restaurant.

The store’s name is *Dear*. It’s a restaurant with private rooms for royalty or nobles on official business. It’s not a place for children like me to go to, but the kind of place that entertains and serves adults. I know of it, but I’ve never been there, nor did I have plans to go there.

What eccentric invited a student like me there? Hoping that I had misread the name signed at the end of the card, I picked it up.

The white and gold embellishments were beautiful and suggested the sender was an excessive person.

“Runa Vi Leonova” was written in neat letters that were easy to read. My hope that I had misread the name was crushed.

I went pale. For a while now, my fingers have been feeling strange. It was like my hands had gone numb and my temperature was gradually being stolen.

I felt like throwing up and I wondered if I couldn’t just refuse the cause of my deteriorating health. I knew it was impossible, but shouldn’t you allow me to escape from reality at least this much?

Chapter 83 Treasure Your Childhood Friends

To tell the truth, I was hoping that the appointed time wouldn't come, but there's no way that such good luck would visit someone like me. I'm so unlucky that I'd rather be cursed than whatever I have now. Although, I did develop some expectations since nothing happened at the academy.

My fight with Tuvalu cost me three times as much as it should have.

The Prince was right there to witness that incident. What if he brings that up?

No, I don't think I was wrong. In the first place, I was just hoping to return the favor to Tuvalu. Even though the outcome wasn't what I expected, Tuvalu did it to me, so I should do it back.

".... But, still, maybe I went too far."

Of course, not for Tuvalu, for Runa. For Tuvalu, I think it was too light. What's wrong with wanting him to do some self-reflection?

He insulted my precious childhood friend, so I'm never going to change my stance.

But, I also did the same to Runa. At the time, I wanted to return the blow, so I insulted his precious Tuvalu.

I was the same as Tuvalu then. It was like I hit him with a stray bullet, so of course I feel upset.

It wasn't right of me to involve Runa, just because I wanted to hurt Tuvalu.

"I should probably apologize, huh..."

Well, I regret what I said about as much as a flea, but I will reflect on making Runa uncomfortable.

Honestly, I should've apologized to Runa while at school, but Tuvalu was always around him so I never had the courage to talk to him. It felt like trying to get past a vicious beast to talk to its owner—suicide.

".... Yeah, this will be a good opportunity."

Since I have this opportunity, I won't have to apologize when I'm back at school, right? I resigned myself to some anger. It should be fine as long as I properly lower my head... probably. Runa isn't particularly friendly but he is the nice type of character. Although, maybe only to the heroine.

".... What kind of clothes should I wear to that kind of place?"

I've never been to a high-class restaurant before. There had never been a need to, since the quality of food at home was wonderful already. However, an unforeseen drawback is that I don't know how to dress for certain occasions. I don't like eating out though, so I hope this doesn't happen again.

It would have been fine if I could consult with my mother but when I think about the contents of the card, I stop myself.

"Furthermore, keep this matter a secret. I want to talk just the two of us."

The writer is the grandiloquent prince, after all. It's best to look the other way when they push troublesome things on you.

I fear he might bring up the topic of my fiancé candidacy again when I meet him too. I don't want to think about anymore unnecessary worries. Honestly, if anything more happens, I'll probably become a shut-in and never leave my house.

"If I wear a party dress then it might be weird."

When I think about the occasion it's definitely strange, also they are hard to move in. They don't look like clothes that I'd go out to play in either. I need something that won't arouse suspicion from my mother...

"... Maybe one of these is fine."

All of the clothes in my closet are high quality. I don't have clothes that are unsuitable for my older appearance nor do I have clothes that are too cute for my mental age.

As a result, my clothes give off a mature vibe and don't make me uncomfortable. I never thought they would be useful like this. What a fortunate miscalculation.

"Rather than a dress, maybe this set... yes, looks good." [like a set clothes]

I chose a random matching set of clothes and put it on a stand. If I do so, Ann and the other maids will choose matching shoes and accessories to go with it.

One of the problems I had with dorm life was that I couldn't have Ann help me coordinate my outfits. Well, they usually picked clothes that I liked, so there wasn't much coordinating. They did have fun with it though.

Now that I've picked my clothes, I just have to wait until the appointed day.

I'll just tell my mother that I'm going out and when I come home I'll go barge in on Keito.

"Haa... My stomach hurts."

I wonder if I'm the only one who feels more agony when I'm on standby than during the actual event.

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I said that waiting was the worst, but I change my mind. The actual day is the hardest. I want to go back three days, before I saw the letter would be best.

The effects of Neriell's healing aura ran out before the appointed day. This is the feeling when you head for the guillotine, trust me, I'm talking from experience.

"You are Mariabell Tempest-sama, yes?"

"Yes."

As soon as I entered the restaurant, even though I wasn't being particularly loud, the workers respectfully bowed. They did it so perfectly that I felt a little grossed out. It didn't seem human. Maybe I shouldn't talk since I am cared for by service dolls.

The private room I was guided to had a gorgeous door. It was a double door, as wide as the hallway. It even had a doorman.... Is it really okay for someone like me to be here?

"Mariabell Tempest-sama has arrived."

"Enter."

When the person guiding me heard the answer, they put one knee on the ground and stayed where they were. The door was opened by the doorman.

Until I entered the room, they kept their heads lowered. It reminded me of a ball from a picture book. When the princess entered the venue, in an instant, everyone fell completely silent.

The person in this room could organize such a ball though, so it's nothing to joke about.

"Pardon me."

I took one step in the room. Yep, there was a disparity between the atmosphere of the room and a kid like me.

Even so, the person sitting in the center of the room in a sofa did not show any sign of discomfort... If anything, he was so majestic that the room didn't suit him.

"I'm sorry for making you wait... Prince Runa."

"No, don't worry. I was the one who called you here suddenly without telling you why."

I will worry. Not as a royal's subordinate, but as a villainess with a scheme and a capture target. I'm worried.

"Um..."

I approached the couch across from Runa and stopped next to it. Before I sit, I should say what I came here to say first.

"I'm very sorry about the other day."

".....!?"

I vigorously lowered my head, causing my hair to slip in front of my face and obstruct my field of view.

Victory goes to the one makes the first move... or maybe that doesn't fit quite right with this situation. However, I am hoping that by apologizing before he starts to scold me, I'll rekindle the kindness in his heart and he will let me off. He doesn't seem like the type to stay angry for a long time, so if I curtail his initial anger, maybe he'll reassess his feelings.

"... Lift your head and sit."

".... Yes."

I swept my hair back in place when I raised my head. I have plenty of experience bowing my head in society. It is the bare minimum to not show anyone anything unsightly. These are the fruits of my efforts as a noble lady.

I arranged my skirt to sit down in the sofa and was surprised when I sank into the seat. As expected of a high-class store—their tables and chairs are on a different level. I have never felt this sensation before even in my room. This is not just any restaurant.

“You’re apologizing about the incident in the student council room, right?”

There isn’t anything else besides that... eh, there shouldn’t be anything else right?

If there is, I certainly don’t remember.

“If it is about that time then Miss Mariabell, you did not do anything wrong.”

“Eh...”

“Actually... Tuvalu said something very rude. I’m very sorry.”

“Eh, no... Prince Runa, that’s not something you should say. It’s my fault, I ended up getting you involved.”

I did not expect this development. Is this person lowering his head to me really the Prince? He’s not a body double?

No, no, no. Runa-sama apologizing to me troubles me. Furthermore, Runa didn’t do anything wrong!

What do I do, this is too unexpected!

“At that time, I didn’t stop him. I should have apologized sooner but... I’m always with Tuvalu at school.”

Well, that’s true. That’s why I didn’t go to apologize to you, after all.

“I thought about summoning you to my house but... Tuvalu might have found out. He should apologize too but... If I force him to then there’s no meaning.”

Forcing him to apologize would just dig the hole deeper after all. Although with Tuvalu it wouldn’t just be any hole, it would be a hole straight to hell. As expected of a childhood friend, an excellent decision.

It seems like Runa called me thinking the same way as me.

I wanted to apologize for involving him and he wanted to apologize for not stopping his childhood friend. Thanks to Tuvalu being an obstacle, we didn’t get to apologize until now.

Give me back all the time I spent being nervous. I’d like to bill Tuvalu, who was the indirect cause of my anxiety.

“To you and Eilis, I’m sorry for giving you an unpleasant experience. I considered inviting Eilis here too but...”

“I didn’t tell Keito.”

“That’s what I thought, so I didn’t invite him. I would do the same if my childhood friend were attacked. There’s no need to hurt them meaninglessly.”

“... Thank you.”

Right now, looking at Runa, I seriously wonder why Tuvalu turned out the way he did, when he had a great role model beside him. It’s truly a mystery.

I do understand his family situation influenced his personality but even so, he was around such a good human being from a young age... Aaah, that’s why he’s such a yandere. If I think of the heroine as his second target for his yandere affections, then Runa is definitely the first. His little sister will always be his little sister so I’ll exclude her as a target.

“I too should not have acted in such a way and gotten Prince Runa involved. I’m very sorry.”

Yes, with this, the friction between Runa and I should be resolved.

It’s not like we got along well in the first place but... we were at a good point of neutral acquaintances.

“But, Prince Runa.”

You apologized to me and I have apologized to you. My apology was from my heart, I meant it.

However, I don’t want you to get the wrong idea.

“I will not forgive Tuvalu-sama.”

I reflected and then apologized only to Runa. Tuvalu? I hate him from the bottom of my heart. What of it?

“I don’t understand his intentions by saying those things and I don’t want to know. I do feel sorry for involving you but... I won’t forgive him.”

“... Yes, I understand.”

I’m not mad, it’s much more than hatred or a grudge. I’m sure that if Tuvalu talked to me with a smile I could reply with a smile. I will disparage him in my heart though. Acting like I am over the events of that day is no problem.

But, I won’t forgive him. I’ll never forgive him. I hate Tuvalu from the bottom of my heart.

I am well aware that he is Runa’s precious childhood friend but, if Tuvalu were to misunderstand that my apology to Runa meant I had forgiven him, I might end up hating Runa too.

“You might think Tuvalu is the worst. No matter what I say or how I try to reason, I can’t justify his words and conduct on that day.”

The reason why Tuvalu picked a fight with me, was just because he hated me. Or it was because of that event that happened in the past at the castle.

“But, for me, Tuvalu is my precious childhood friend.”

Even if you don't hate me, even if you don't speak poorly of me, even if you don't forgive him.

However, just like me, Runa's stance on his childhood friend will not waver. That's what he is saying.

"If that's what you have decided, then I have no right to say anything further."

Not just me—no one has the right to say anything about your relationships.

There are people who will dislike you because you like someone they dislike. They'll think you were tricked, or that your judgment was clouded by a common interest, or that you get along because of an equally bad personality. They'll think things like "birds of a feather flock together." To a rather refreshing degree, there are a lot of people who believe that their beliefs are shared across the world.

Yes, like me, Mariabell. Mariabell had that same view and forced the heroine to be friendless. She was poor at studying and had only her splendid craftiness.

"My feelings are my own. I should have ended the matter between Tuvalu and I... I insulted your precious childhood friend in front of your eyes, I'm truly, very sorry."

Repeating myself again, I feel like I'm speaking from a higher position. But, I don't have anything else to say... I really am just sorry for involving Runa, truly from my heart.

I just want to make my feelings completely clear.

"Is that so..."

"I say so impertinently."

"No... Thank you. Your feelings, I have received them."

I don't need to ask other noble ladies to know that this is definitely a strange conversation. The two of us apologized, without the person in question even being here. Even if he were, I wouldn't forgive him.

He thanked me in the end, but I'm glad he accepted my apology.

I finished my business here but since I came all this way, I drank some black tea and ate some sweets before returning home. It was the prince's treat.

"The one who invited you was me, so please don't hesitate."

This place is absurdly expensive, you know? The prince quickly signed some kind of bill and that was it. That's royalty for you. I was a little moved seeing it happen. I am also a noble but on the inside I'm just a commoner.

Ah, by the way, this was my last memory of my long vacation. Vacation was a little tough. I'd like to say that it was a good vacation in the end but, it was neither good nor bad... It was just normal, maybe.

Chapter 84 The New Semester

Even though the vacation was supposed to be long, it passed in the blink of an eye. People came over to play, I went out to play, one way or another I had a fulfilling vacation. But, that's not enough for me to say I'm satisfied. I wouldn't mind at all if vacation lasted my whole life.

"Haa..."

"Seventh time."

"... Haa."

"Eight time. You're being a bit gloomy you know."

"Two more times and I'll be fine."

"I'd prefer if you didn't."

The reason why I can't stop sighing is because I'm becoming depressed that tomorrow is the last day of vacation. The day after tomorrow is when people will be returning to the dorms.

The time to leave for school marks the end of various things for me. Peace never continues for eternity.

"I felt the blessing of being at your own home..."

"Really? I think the dorms are more convenient. I don't have to do any chores."

Keito often split housework with his father so it's easy to understand why he enjoys dorm life where there's a cafeteria and where people who will clean for you. In exchange, on the occasion he goes home, he has to toil away to clean his messy house, so I wonder which option is truly better.

To me, academy is not a place to raise flags, but enemy territory. [1]

I did discover that Runa is a wonderful person. As long as he stays in that proper position, he might be able to keep Tuvalu from running wild. Runa is that important to Tuvalu, after all.

With that in mind, it is still a fact that Tuvalu and I consider each other enemies.

.... My stomach is hurting.

"But, it felt much shorter than it was. Even though I played with you as usual."

"Actually, I thought so too... We also went to Neriels."

Keito attended elementary school so he is used to having a long vacation but he basically just plays with me and never goes out with his dad. Apparently he goes to play with his friends sometimes, but the majority of his time is spent with me.

"It was your first time going on a trip. It was a new experience for you."

"True, I normally just pass the time here."

It's probably strange that we've spent many years together without leaving this property. We lived on the same property so we didn't need to make appointments and the most comfortable place for us to relax and play was the rose garden.

"Well, even if we return to school, it'll be the same. The Tempest house will just become the academy."

"That's... well..."

The Tempest grounds will just become the academy grounds.

Since I'm not in a club, I've been visiting Keito more and more after school and our dorms may be different, but that's not particularly new.

I understand, very well. But, even though I understand,

"... I don't want to go."

I'm throwing a small tantrum, but I think he'll forgive me.

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Throwing a tantrum, resisting, there's a time when everybody does so. I'm against favoritism and discrimination but I believe distinction is important. I knew that, but I stepped over the line.

"It's been a long time, everyone."

Among the students gathered in the lecture hall, you are probably the only one who thinks so.

Hurry up and end it, I'm exhausted. Listening to an elderly person talk for a long time isn't particularly fun.

No matter what world you are in, opening ceremonies are time-consuming things.

I barely remember any of the entrance ceremony since I was being overly conscious of Saashia. When automode was still in action, I don't remember the entrance ceremony happening either.

When the yawn-fest ended, all the students went to their classrooms.

The faces of my classmates that I haven't seen in a long time were a little nostalgic but if you asked me if I was happy, I'd answer not really. I'm happy to see Eru and Primella but the feeling I have towards returning to school is painful.

"Good day to you, Maria-chan."

"Morning."

"Good day to the two of you."

"We hung out over the vacation so it doesn't feel like it's been a while, huh."

After they first came over, we went out to play many times. Primella invited me to her house so we went shopping together before I went over. Eru's house is a store so we couldn't freely go and play there, though.

It somehow was a fulfilling summer vacation, huh. My feelings of reluctance for vacation ending have doubled.

“Maria-san, it’s been a while!!”

“Saashia-sama, good day to you. It has been a while.”

Thank you for that refreshing smile that is the same as the one from my memory. When I see a capture target, I snap back to reality. I’m not happy.

I got used to it before vacation but, now that I think about it, he sits next to me. It’s been a long time but being next to a capture target... Well, it’s Saashia so it’s still okay.

It’s a new semester so I’d like to propose a seat change, please.

Chapter 85 Just Before Festival Weather

Even though it's a new semester, it's still the same as before the vacation.

Go to class, hang out with Keito after school, return to my room, sleep. On days off, I enjoy an elegant time with my friends.

In general, it's a peaceful, normal school life.

But, I understood.

Peaceful and normal days are a forewarning of trouble to come.

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During the day it was hot but the windy nights indicated that fall was coming soon.

The change in the atmosphere around the school should have nothing to do with the change of season. But, in these times, maybe there is some effect.

Speaking of autumn, it's usually the time for a school festival.

But, the scale of the richest school in this world...

".... Oz Festival?"

"Maria-chan, you've never gone to it before?" Primella asked.

"Eh... non-students can go?"

"Of course, it's quite a big festival after all."

Avantor Academy's school festival is, well... This school has already far surpassed my expectations and imagination. I won't be surprised any longer. I'd be more surprised if the festival was within my expectations.

Although it is Avantor Academy's school festival, it's called the Oz Festival. You can imagine why, right? Although it's supposed to connect the town and the academy, honestly, I think it's for a different reason.

First of all, the academy isn't open to all. Or should I say, entering the school is not allowed.

By using Oz Town, which is technically academy property, as the main stage, different classes, clubs, and friends can run different programs. However, students don't work as staff, they only plan. The academy demands students not to actively participate, but to show leadership.

The festival lasts for four days. The first day, we perform various entertainments like plays or music in the school auditorium. On the second and third day, we sell goods in Oz Town. Finally, on the last day, various contests occur.

The high school division's festival takes place on a different day. Since I've always been in class, I'm sure I missed some information.

“You two will be doing something for your club activities, right?” I asked.

“Yes, our class has a lot of people in club activities so our class might not do anything.” Primella said.

“If you have spare time, feel free to come help out my club~” Eru said.

“Is it fine if I go to tease you?”

It looks like I won’t have anything to do this time. So that’s why there wasn’t any information or discussion about what we were doing for the school festival.

I’m lucky that I can just enjoy the festival. Since I’ll have free time, I’ll spend it visiting my friend’s club activities.

I was worried about the festival when I first heard about it but it looks like I worried for nothing. It’s best if I relax more. Feeling too nervous won’t help me at all.

... There’s no such thing as a useless feeling. I will think about its use.

“But, if it’s Maria-chan, she’ll probably be recommended for the Oz Con, right?”

“Heeh...?”

Oz Con, official name, “Oz Contest.”

Simple put, it’s a “Miss Contest.” Not just for looks, but for knowledge, demeanor, and so on. It’s a contest that takes everything into account to choose a splendid lady.

But, the Oz Con is only one of the many events in this school. It really seems like a simple contest where people decide the most beautiful girl, regardless of their school year.

Actually, I have appeared in it before. Among the various contests that the school holds, the Oz Con is the one people get the most excited over, so the high school division holds one as well. During an automode, I got second place to the heroine.

Whose route was it... Runa and Tuvalu had to make rounds as part of the student council. It certainly happened in Saashia’s route. I acted as a hindrance over and over again in the midst of my adolescence.

So, I’m not particularly surprised by the contest itself. It’s an event for an otome game, after all. It’s the best stage for revealing the heroine’s cuteness.

So, I’m not surprised about the event itself.

Just now, did she say recommendation? Eh, is she telling me to recommend myself? Did I recommend myself?

During automode, I had won four years in a row. I was even told that I was a shoo-in the last year, but since the heroine had joined suddenly due to a lack of participants, I lost first place to her, you know.

“Recommended for Oz Con... Who’s going to recommend me?”

“Hmmm... Usually people with a lot of friends get recommended but, I heard you can submit recommendations anonymously to the student council. Of course, the judging is very strict, so either way it's not easy.”

“After the initial stages, depending on the number of people who pass, I think the student council and festival committee members will enter to make up the numbers.”

It really helps a lot that these two know a lot of things. Maybe I just don't know enough but, it's not odd that they know more than I do. They are involved in clubs and what not, so they hear more things from their upperclassmen and people around them.

“I would recommend Maria-chan~” Primella said.

“If you do, I will immediately decline.”

If it's a recommendation from friends then it would only be these two. I must use all my power to prevent that.

“I knooooow. Maria-chan hates standing out, after all.”

“I was asked by the committee to recommend you too, but I refused.” Eru added.

“... Thank you.”

Really, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. I'm truly blessed to have friends who understand me fully.

“But, people besides us may recommend you, or even the student council.”

“Eeeh, I know...”

There are tons of possible events. If possible I wouldn't want any of them to happen. I'm not too against this event though because compared to other possible ones, this one is much more uneventful.

People who would recommend me are nonexistent and even if I did get recommended, it doesn't mean I would win.

I am a former champion but that was because Mariabell was attractive AND had plenty of followers to back her up.

No matter how exciting an event is, there will always be people who don't care about it. That type of people was Mariabell's strongest supporters, since they would only remember her out of all the other contestants. She was the most fervent candidate, after all. They would vote for her without caring for the purpose of the contest.

As I think about it again and again, it's definitely a foul play to win. With this method, she had a four-year streak... Well, it's true that her appearance is extraordinary. She was a beauty that could appear in a beauty contest after all.

“In the unlikely event that I do get recommended, I'll think about it then. More importantly, have you two decided what you will be doing?”

“The handicrafts club sells goods every year. Things like negotiating for the vendor location are handled by the upperclassmen.” Primella said.

“I’m not doing anything. Not just the track and field club, all the athletic clubs are worried during the festival time.” Eru said.

“Fufu, I look forward to it.”

Come to think of it, I wonder what Keito will do, club activities or his class activities... Hopefully he’ll be doing something for the gardening club. Even if Runa and that guy will be doing things for the Student Council, I’d rather not approach their class.

I’ll ask him after school. I want to know what kind of thing he’ll be doing too.

Chapter 86 Upperclassmen Are Mature For Their Age

As the days passed, the school gradually became engulfed by the festival atmosphere.

Though I say that, I had nothing to do so I acted as usual. Rather, I actually have more free time since Primella and Eru are busy preparing for the festival instead of hanging out with me.

My only worry was Keito, but it seems like he will be participating in his club activities.

It's quite peaceful. I'm actually very bored.

In the school, in Oz Town, anywhere there are people, they are making preparations. I have to be careful where I relax by myself. For the time being, Oz stores are open for business—but barely. Students are preparing there, too. They would feel uncomfortable if they were busy at work next to a slacker. I'm probably not the only one who thinks that.

So, it might bother people if I walk around aimlessly. Because of this, there are two things I can do: return to my room or help someone out. Of course, I could calm down spending time alone in my room but, spending time with my friends doing festival preparations also seems fun.

I chose the charming second option.

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“Maria-chan, please bring that over here.”

“Understood. You don't need this here anymore?”

“Aah, that color won't match well...”

“Cattleya-sama, are the measurements fine?”

“Ah, yes! I'll be there soon!”

People were jumbled together and busily moving around here and there while holding cloth. There were students wearing uniforms, teachers I've seen before, and unfamiliar adults. There was a high ratio of adults to child. This is definitely a school for the rich.

I'm currently in the drama club's room... which is one ridiculously big room. It was about the size of a classroom. Was the drama club this big? Furthermore, the club is gender separated so apparently there is another room *and* they have another room to store their props too... Yep, let's stop thinking like this or else I'll be baffled forever.

Thinking I would help Primella or Eru since I had time to spare, I had headed to their building. But before I met them, I ran into Cattleya-sama. She asked me for help, and as a result I'm here.

“If we want to emphasize the feel of the material then we should use a real one....”

“If we do that, it'll be heavy, you know? If I'm not mistaken, there should be a scene where Chris will be princess carried.”

“Then let's use a lighter material and color-”

The drama club was preparing for a performance for the school festival—naturally they are busy due to the quality that they want to achieve.

The costumes and props will be made by adult craftsmen but choosing the design and the materials is the club members' job. Rather than festival preparations, it feels more like a project meeting.

I'm an emergency helper so I'm only helping with simple work: acting as a messenger, counting the props, checking if the finished products have the same pattern, etc.

When I see the club members going to and from the room I wonder if there isn't there a material you can use for everything... But I shouldn't say anything that I can't deliver on. It might increase their workload so it's best if I stay silent and watch.

"I'm sorry, Maria-chan, this too please!!"

"Ah, yes!"

Among a room full of commotion, the person moving around the most was Cattleya-sama. Moving here and there and being called for from all directions... she is someone who has played the starring role for more than three years.

Choosing materials, deciding the designs, checking the props, and even discussing the lighting. Even though if she would just leave the props to someone else, she would have an easier time.

Nevertheless, I'm just saying that because I could never handle what she does. I will be silent and concentrate on doing my own work.

I wasn't super busy but I was flustered. When I finished a job, I would occasionally take a break. Before I realized, the view from the window had become separated by red and black.

"Maria-chan! I'm sorry, you stayed until so late to help..."

"No, not at all... I had time to spare so I'm glad I could be of use."

"You were a huge help! Today, we were lacking hands because a lot of people had to help with their class preparations."

"Aah, that's why..."

No wonder I thought that there weren't enough members for the amount of work there was. That's why Cattleya-sama was running around so much, huh. The people that were usually here were out so her workload increased.

I couldn't even cover for one absent person's workload... I hope I at least didn't get in the way and helped a little bit.

"Next, we have to take Chris... the heroine's measurements and check the props, so you can be finished now. Thank you so much for your help."

With just a glance I could tell that there was still a ton of work left. Although not many members were rushing around, I could see serious discussions occurring.

Surely long after I leave, the lights in the room will be on. However, the rest of the work was probably things I couldn't assist with. Of course, Cattleya-sama is a prince that transcends gender, so she is being mindful of the time too.

If that's the case, then trying to force useless help on them would only annoy them. Insisting on helping and ending up in a verbal tug-of-war would also waste their time.

"... I understand, then I will be leaving first."

"Yes! The dorm is close by but be careful, okay?"

"Yes. Everyone, please don't overdo it."

I bowed once before leaving the room, causing a chorus of "good bye" and "thank you." Until now, I had never participated in a club activity, so it was a little embarrassing.

Maybe it would have been better if I had just joined a club that I had been mildly interested in... I was worried that I wouldn't be able to look up to middle school upperclassmen since I had already experienced high school, but the upperclassmen were more mature than I expected.

I shook off my slight feelings of regret and tried to organize my thoughts. I slowly began to walk back to the dorms and wondered what today's dinner would be.

I was unaware of who entered the club room after I turned my back on the drama club.

"I'm back~"

"Ah, Chris, welcome back. Is your class going to be okay?"

"Yeah, I'm sorry I couldn't help out. Hey, the girl who just left..."

"An underclassman I know helped us out. Remember when I was talking about a beautiful girl? It was her."

"Aah, the girl you were interested in. This is my first time seeing her."

"She's a girl that stands out... You don't really interact with any underclassmen outside of club though."

"It's not like I'd hit on a girl just because I'm interested in her like you but... what was her name?"

"Aah, Maria-chan... Mariabell Tempest-chan."

Chapter 87 Even If I Know of Them, There's No Point if We Haven't Met

I was digging into the ground. You can tell if someone is a beginner because they don't know how deep to go. For now, I'll dig until I'm stopped.

After helping the drama club, I ended up having more free time, so I went to search for something to do. Perhaps it was partly because I was yearning for club life, but I had also enjoyed the atmosphere when I was helping the drama club.

However, because Eru's club had enough people and Primella's club was the type to make individual projects, there wasn't much for me to do.

Ultimately, I thought of going to Keito's place to... help. What am I doing now? It feels like I'm just playing.

"Maria, that should be deep enough."

"Kay, what are you going to plant in here?"

"Hmm... I received some seeds. They've probably been altered so I don't know what they are."

"That's quite lackadaisical."

"There are a lot of plants at this school that I don't know about, you know. Hey, I'm going to plant it now so stand up."

"Okaaay."

I'm already used to Keito's appearance in overalls. As always, he didn't care that he was covered in dirt. However, I usually remained in my school uniform. I'm not worried about tomorrow's clothes, so I don't make it a habit to carry around work clothes, even if mine get dirty.

If I roll up my sleeves, wear gloves, and use a spade to dig, I can easily avoid getting dirty. But, I feel like this might be unacceptable as a noble lady. So, usually I don't dress like this. However, I figured that since it was the season for the school festival preparations, people would overlook my appearance.

"There's dirt on your face."

"Eh, no way."

"That's why I said to wrap a towel around... No, it's over here."

"Yea but I don't like using it."

Keito gently rubbed my face and showed me a small brown fleck on his finger. I had used the towel to wrap up my hair earlier, but did I have it on when I was wiping my sweat off?

As Keito had said, it would have been fine if I had used the towel, but it makes it hard to breathe so I didn't. It gets stuffy when I wrap it around my mouth and it feels gross.

“How about washing your hands before wiping your face again. In the meantime, I’ll plant the seeds.”

“Okay, but-”

“We’re done after planting them so it’s fine.”

I was thinking of helping more if there was any work left but it looked like most of the work was done. If I think about the number of holes I dug and how fast Keito can plant seeds... I would just be in the way if I tried to help.

Keito came with his things, so he’ll definitely return to the dorms without changing. In that case, it won’t do any good to stand around doing nothing. I guess I’ll take this opportunity to go to the powder room that is a ways away. I want to check in the mirror if there’s anymore dirt on my face.

“Then, I’ll be back.”

“Yea, see you soon.”

Keito was already immersed in playing with the soil as he waved at me.

Keito has a deadpan face most of the time. I wonder if there are people who have seen his smile besides me.

I took a handkerchief out of my bag and then speed walked to the nearest powder room.

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Powder rooms... although the strong implication is that of a girls bathroom, this one is way too big and just looks like a dressing room. The sinks are in a different location too, so you can’t mistake it for a normal bathroom. There’s too much girl power in the girl’s bathroom so I can’t calm down.

“Oh, no, you can still definitely tell...”

My face, reflected in the mirror, was not dirty. Maybe it was only where Keito had already wiped off.

However, as I expected when I undid my hair, which was already a natural mess of a perm, was even frizzier. The traces of my fieldwork remained.

My hair has been like this since birth. It can’t be helped; I’ll just tie it up again. We’re just going back to the dorms after this anyway.

“.... Okay.”

I fixed my bangs and moved away from the dresser so I could see my whole body. I thought I looked fine but I patted my skirt off just in case. There might be something on me that I can’t see and I did come to fix my appearance in the mirror.

I spun around to check if there was anything behind me. I don’t usually worry this much about my appearance but no one is around. If there were people around, I would be a nuisance even though the bathroom was so big. I have no more business to do here so there’s no reason to stay.

Although I say that, Keito is waiting for me, so I should get going now. The moment I looked away from the mirror, I saw.

“Ah...”

“Oh my...”

The door opened and an incredibly beautiful person walked in.

Straight hair like gold thread, jade green eyes, white skin with bright red lips. Beauty that would attract anyone’s gaze. She looked too perfect to be real, like if you touched her, her existence would fade.

The sleeves of her shirt were rolled up and her skirt lay flat. She resembled Cattleya-sama’s simplicity. The gap between her appearance and her clothes only emphasized her beauty.

And then, I realized. I have seen her before.

She was associated with Cattleya-sama, the red riding hood girl.

She was the heroine that captured everyone’s hearts during the school excursion. What was her name... Christine-sama.

“Tsu...” [just a noise]

I almost called out to her, but realized I’m just a stranger to her. It would be a bother if I made a fuss over a celebrity and she might hate that feeling.

We both know Cattleya-sama, but she’s not here right now so I shouldn’t just use her name like that.

I should just bow politely here and take my leave... is what I was thinking but...

“Good timing... I wanted to meet you.”

“Ha...”

“Nice to meet you, Mariabell Tempest-san.”

Chapter 88 Beautiful People Have Thorns

She tilted her head slightly and traced her cheek with her finger.

Her movement, the shape of her eyes, the shape of her mouth; every part of her was like a work of art. I was so enchanted by her beauty it took me some time to understand her words.

She said she wanted to meet me. She wanted to meet me.

Eh, why?

I have thought that I wanted to meet her before, but to her I should be a complete stranger. One among a sea of underclassmen. I'm on the same level as villager C.

Did she hear about me from Cattleya-sama? She does value me too highly and kind of dotes on me for some reason.

They are in the same club and about as popular so they are probably friends... right? Club members are different from friends but I feel like they have some kind of solidarity. Is that just my preconception?

"Ah, I'm sorry. I haven't even introduced myself yet, how rude of me."

"N-no, that's my line..."

"I'm Chris, Christine Reishia. I perform in the drama club."

"I saw you perform as Red Riding Hood at the school excursion. It was very wonderful... My friends and I were completely absorbed in your performance."

"Oh thank you. It was a difficult role so when you say it like that it makes me happy."

"Um... So, why do you know about me..."

"Cattleya said she asked an underclassman to help out. Before that I heard from her about a beautiful girl in school but... I didn't think it was you. I'm glad, it saves me some trouble."

"Trouble...?"

"I have always wanted to speak to you."

The corners of her beautiful mouth were raised so it looked like she was smiling. However, I had a feeling that she didn't have such welcoming feelings for me.

From my experiences up until now, when you're called to in these kinds of settings, generally something bad is going to go down. I know from experience and I'm used to unpleasantness.

I wanted to run away but the exit was behind Christine-sama... There have been many times where I have wanted to talk to someone face to face, but if I had the courage to do so, I wouldn't have avoided so many things in the first place.

"Umm... Do you need something?"

Getting into a quarrel with an upperclassman in the bathroom... If this were a shoujo manga then it would certainly be pointless bullying. It definitely feels like that kind of scene. I've done it before, back in the automode times.

But, this probably isn't anything like bullying, right? Surely.

I say this because of Christine-sama's personality... if it were bullying, she wouldn't be speaking beautifully. Her behavior was too lukewarm for this to be an attack on me.

It's a one-on-one between me and Christine-sama. Considering that we are an upperclassmen and an underclassman, she needs at least three people. Better too big than too small. The majority has the edge over the minority. Moreover, the first impression is the most important. Of course, appearances are important but if you want to overpower the opponent quickly, then the more lackeys you bring the better.

If you can't bring enough people, then you shouldn't try a frontal attack. It's best to act quietly from the shadows or to pretend like you are a kind bystander. Supposing the bathroom is the stage, pouring water into a stall from above would be a basic procedure.

Why do I know so many details? Of course it's from experience. A page from my black history.

"Could it be, there was something wrong with my help?"

"No. About that, all of the club members are very grateful. Thank you."

"Is that so..."

Then I can't think of any other reasons... If she were here to complain, then I could have laughed it off like Francia-sama. These kinds of enigmatic opponents trouble me the most.

"Um, then why..."

"I came to ask Mariabell-sama... you, in a battle."

"Oh, that's it..."

.... Hm? A battle?

"A battle, eh... EH!?"

What's with this sudden development? Today was our first time meeting, right? I remember saying "nice to meet you."

Also, was Christine-sama a belligerent type of person, contrary to her appearance? I won't be infatuated by that kind of gap so please fix this right now. [look up gap moe if you're confused]

"U-um, why do you... what do you mean by battle?"

"The Oz Contest."

"... Ozcon?"

"I will be participating in it. And, I recommended you as a participant."

“HAAH...!?”

I let out a noise unbecoming of a young lady, but I think this much should be allowed this time. It's better than grabbing Chris-sama's collar and yelling “YOU'RE FUCKING KIDDING ME” right?

Why did she do such an unnecessary thing? I cried from the depths of my heart. I heard about the recommendation system for the Ozcon. From experience I knew that if I were recommended that there would be a strict examination. It's difficult to refuse. That's why my friends were careful not to recommend me and refused any recommendations for me.

As I thought, this person came to attack me. Rather than using numbers or petty tricks, she used something that would critically damage me, something they knew I hated.

“At Ozcon, I want to have a match with you.”

Don't say such selfish things. I really wanted to tell her off—it would be easy. My head was in a chaotic frenzy and I honestly couldn't think straight. Using the last of my reason, I tried to cool my head and think of a way to resolve this situation.

“With the position of Runa-sama's fiancé as the stake.”

Until I heard the words that left Christine-sama's mouth.

Thanks to her words, my brain completely cooled off, but at the same time I went pale. What the hell is this person saying?

Chapter 89 Declining a Declaration of War

Normally when you bet something on a match, it should be something that both people are competing for. Something both people want a lot, right?

I have never gambled before nor have I ever bet something on a showdown before. Mariabell used her political power to get her hands on anything and everything she wanted and failed in the end. Maybe I just don't understand gambling, though I do understand the feeling of wanting to compete for a free giveaway.

In any case, if the winner sees no value in the prize, then the match is over automatically, right?

Personally, I don't want the match to happen, so I'll try to decline.

"Um... I think there's a misunderstanding? I was listed as a candidate before, but it should already be cancelled."

At least, Runa himself had said that it probably would be someone else. I don't know how much influence a prince has on choosing his fiancée, but I had been denying rumors because I trusted him... Although it seems my denials haven't spread much. Give me a break!

"Cancelled... What happened for the favored candidate to have such a misunderstanding..."

"....."

That's my line, what kind of misunderstanding do you have.

Favored candidate? Those are words foreign to me.

"If I'm not mistaken, there are plenty of fiancée candidates for Runa-sama and there are names that have stood out. But... no one is on the same level as you."

That doesn't matter to me at all. I certainly am of the highest level in terms of lineage, but I don't have any talents that could be of use to the country. If I were good at something, I would first use them to do something about my destruction flags. Furthermore, Runa is a minefield of destruction flags.

What kind of person would charge into a bomb?

"Right now, there are two likely candidates to become Runa-sama's fiancée. One is you and the other is... me."

My shoulders suddenly felt heavy from the gravity of her words.

I should have broken the flag long ago... The flag I had put my all into breaking was still alive. Furthermore, I wasn't just a candidate but the favored one. Is this hell!?

And, Christine-sama was causing mayhem with this truth right in front of me.

There wasn't.... supposed to be this kind of development in the game. Could it be, Mariabell forced the other candidates to yield to become Runa's official fiancée? It's possible. She did have the political power and the personality for it.

Otherwise, if the heroine chose a target besides Runa then the fiancée wouldn't be Mariabell, but someone else. In the end, the prince had to marry someone out of duty if he didn't end up with the heroine. Part of his job is to make blood ties.

I only know that in the future of the hero and heroine, Mariabell will be showered with misfortune. I don't know anything else besides that.

And, while the heroine is not here, the game won't begin so I cannot do anything. Villainesses sure are unreasonable. Be gentle with me, I did enough work for five people.

"I'm surprised. There have been candidates who have stood out until now, but none of them were a match for me."

Christine-sama became Runa's fiancée candidate before I was even proposed as one. Before she was old enough to understand what was happening, she was already being raised to become Runa's fiancée. Although she was still only a candidate, her surroundings thought it was already 90% decided and that her status was just a formality. It looks like she thought so too.

The reason why Runa had rejected me must have been because of Christine-sama's existence.

As I thought, Mariabell had definitely used under-handed methods to get the candidacy. How could she do things like that... If Christine-sama becomes the fiancée then I can be done with being a villainess. It's one thing to hear about being exiled to a foreign country but it actually happening can cost you your life, okay!

"That's why this time also, your presence didn't bother me. I had confidence that no matter who my opponent was, I'd be chosen in the end. There wasn't anyone more suitable for Runa-sama than me... At least that's what I thought."

For Runa's sake, so that she would look his equal, she had put in every possible amount of work. She has the etiquette to stand next to the prince, the future king, as a princess as well. The time she's spent and her feelings, she had confidence that she would lose to no one. That's confidence for you.

The moment she has been pouring everything into for had almost come and she didn't think it was just a dream.

Like a comet, another favorite appeared. The rumors followed her around, Tempest family's gorgeous daughter.

Mariabell Tempest... Me.

"Hearing about you, I investigated you immediately. Lineage, appearance, ability... I researched it all. I understood why you were the strongest candidate. You certainly are an existence suitable to stand next to Runa-sama."

I'm being praised, right? Christine-sama surely thinks there is no higher form of praise than what she is saying.

But I'm not even 1 micron happy. Every word and phrase coming out of her mouth has been a brutal blow, so I'm on the verge of dying.

"That's why... I want to have a match. Fair and square, for the right to be by Runa-sama's side."

Her train of thought was impossible for me to understand.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, I was a suitable fiancée for Runa. I really don't acknowledge that at all, but I have to move this conversation along. I don't actually think I am at all.

Even if it were true, what's the point of having a match? If I have to marry Runa, I'll surely die. The only thing waiting for me if I become his fiancée is death itself. Isn't that the complete opposite of happiness?

It's extremely unfortunate that I am somehow the favored candidate but, I will do whatever it takes to wipe that notion away. My life is literally at stake, after all.

Honestly, for me, Christine-sama's existence is my salvation. She's like a goddess descending from the heavens.

If she continues at this rate and becomes Runa's fiancée, then I'll have one less destruction path to worry about. With just a small step, I can go from diving headfirst towards the heroine to being completely safe. *And* Runa can have a happy future. Talk about two birds with one stone. Although 90% of that is at my convenience.

"The prize for winning Ozcon isn't much, so having the fiancée candidacy on the line should be in your favor. It's the best stage for our battle."

Certainly in terms of appearances, it's hard to say who is superior between the two of us. If someone finds someone beautiful then there is surely someone who thinks the opposite. Supposing the majority decided the outcome, a contest that can give concrete placements could influence a fiancée selection.

A royalty's fiancée should have a good face but her social status and ability, no matter how trivial the difference, can become an important factor. Although I really don't care, I want nothing to do with this.

"If it's you, you'll easily pass the preliminary judging."

"No, Um... I don't want to have a match..."

If I am still a candidate, I can't clearly reject being his fiancée. My words could be misconstrued to be disparagement or disrespect to the prince... People who aren't in danger of being served a full course of destruction can throw someone else under the bus easily with little evidence. For some reason, distorted facts spread further and faster than true ones and people tend to believe the information they hear first.

That's why I have to be indirect, but if I don't clearly decline, then misunderstandings will scatter. The best option is to avoid mentioning Runa, fiancée candidacy, and other delicate matters and just straight up avoid the match. A pointless fight would be born otherwise. I guess someone like me who was just a sacrifice for the heroine's happiness has no persuasive power.

"Are you scared?"

"Eh?"

"That you'll lose and Runa-sama will be taken from you."

Actually it's the opposite you know, kidnap him right now and I wouldn't care. Wait, he's not even mine, I don't need him.

"N-no, that's not it... I didn't know I was still a candidate. And something like marriage... I can't even imagine that right now."

If I could, I would declare that I'm cancelling my candidacy. I'll even sign a pledge. I want to tell the world that I won't marry Runa.

If I did that, my candidacy would be erased for sure but, at the same time my existence would be erased. Just like Mariabell.

I laughed to show her I wasn't trying to trick her and I tried to let out a bitter smile. I wanted her to think it wasn't about Runa, but that I as an individual had never imagined being his fiancée. Honestly, I really can't imagine something like marriage.

"... Everyone always says that in the beginning."

She said in a low voice. I could hear traces of sadness and anger in her tone. Disappointment... She wasn't saying that to me or anyone at all but to herself.

A wrinkle formed on her smooth brow. Her confident atmosphere had fallen. It looks like my statement made her think of something.

"In the beginning everyone acts humble. Because they'll be seen as pure hearted that way. They'll act humble and modest, putting up a pure act... They only keep up that appearance in the beginning though."

A prince's fiancée. What I saw in Christine-sama, who was the closest person to that glorious position, was what I detested most.

Before, Mariabell had caused trouble for her surroundings with her lies, selfishness, and malice. It's not rare in the social world but just because something is common doesn't mean it should be tolerated.

I can understand why Christine-sama doubts me so much. It would be dangerous to accept my words without any questions. I also thought so.

I'm not mad or sad that she doubts me.

It is extremely bothersome for me. Because, my words really are my true feelings... No, I did sugar-coat my true feelings instead of directly declining. I want to show my true feelings—double meanings are bad. Realistically, it'll be bad for me later.

“But, that doesn’t concern me. Your words are lies and you want to increase your standing as a fiancée candidate. It’s a fact that you have that sort of disposition.”

Please stop, if you don’t understand me then the conversation can’t move forward!

I can’t believe it. My intentions weren’t conveyed to her at all. Christine-sama steeled herself and then thrust a ticket straight to hell at me.

“You or anyone else, I will definitely win... I’ll win fairly and I’ll be the one standing next to Runa-sama.”

Chapter 90 Impossible to Understand, or Rather, Denial

Earnest feelings are really strong, regardless of how pure they are.

The former Mariabell dyed her hands with many evil deeds to get her hands on the one she desired.

Her unsightly acts made you want to cover your eyes but she was always serious. Seriously hurting and seriously enjoying herself.

And so, Christine-sama is the same. She seriously wants to defeat me. She doesn't care how I feel, but she wants to push me aside since I seem like I'd get in the way of her standing next to Runa. Without asking others, selfishly, for her self-satisfaction. That's why she can go so far and be so straightforward. She is moving seriously in a straight line, changing into whatever will help her fulfill her goals.

If this were a shoujo manga, Christine-sama would be the heroine and I would be the rival. Well, this is the world of an otome game and I was originally the villainess, so it's not far from that.

However—sorry— there is one important point that differs.

Whether it's a shoujo manga, an otome game, a heroine, a rival, or a villainess, there's something they all have in common.

I don't even like Runa; I'm not even aiming for him out of self-interest!

"That's all I wanted to talk about. I didn't want to win without saying anything and then tell you 'a loser like you is unsuitable' afterwards."

I wish you had told me sooner. Well actually, I wanted you to win without dragging me into it. If you were going to go and have misunderstandings on your own, you should have just misunderstood my intentions and gone ahead and won the match on your own.

By the way, if it were Mariabell, she would have done that. She would have won and then after the match she would have dragged her target in and started throwing insults at them. In the game, the heroine ended up competing but if she hadn't, Mariabell definitely would have used the opportunity to insult her. Mariabell was a shoo-in to win after all.

"Well then, good day to you."

"Eh, wai—"

Nothing is alright...! Hold on, don't just end the conversation!

I wanted to say that, but the words were stuck in my throat. I really wanted to say it but, I couldn't think of anything to say afterwards. In the end, I just had a useless hand raised towards Christine-sama's back as she walked out the door and disappeared.

Well, no matter what I say, she probably wouldn't believe me.

Being Runa's fiancée, it's a position that would cause hands to come out of many noble ladies' throat. [TN: hands coming out of your throat is an imagery for desire] If Runa were scum or trash, I wonder if it would be different... In reality, he's cool, calm, has a strong sense of justice, and is a deep, earnest lover...?. His appearance alone makes him someone to be sought after.

Well, not for me.

"This is the worst..."

Written as the utmost evil, the worst. [This is a reference to kanji, 最悪 is written using the characters the utmost and bad/evil]. My life in the automode was the worst, but that word suits the present situation right now.

Right now, in my head, there are three evils circulating. There are three ultimate terrors destroying me and I feel like I'm falling apart. Each and every one together is the ultimate Gestalt destruction. [TN: Honestly I have no idea what she's saying. Gestalt is a psychology thing about parts coming together as a whole. So, I think she's saying that the three terrors together are magnifying each other.]

"Ah..."

Come to think of it, Keito is waiting for me. That was the only thing the last of my logic could muster. How long did I spend talking to Christine-sama? It felt like I was talking to her for three hours but.... maybe it was only thirty minutes.

It felt like a long time ago that I was playing in the dirt with Keito, but in reality it was just a bit ago. My daily life quickly went from normal to hell in a split second.

Anyway, I should quickly return to Keito.

I rewashed my hands again to calm my fingers, which had become cold.

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"Welcome back, you're late."

"....."

"..... Maria?"

Thanks to Keito's voice, I was able to snap out of it and gather myself. My mind had gone blank due to my encounter with Christine but, it looks like it returned.

Keito's voice calmed me down and so my feet stopped moving. Keito, who had stood up from the bench, could tell that something was wrong when I didn't approach him. My heart was not here. The sight in front of me seemed so far away. It looks like the damage from earlier events still remained.

"Did something happen?"

With his own bag and my bag slung over his shoulder, he peered into my face. He got closer to my face than normal. "His face is as pretty as always," I thought for some reason.

His tone was without doubt and full of assertion; was he asking a question or interrogating me? Usually he would be strong and fearless, but a rare expression of bewilderment was on his face.

Due to the shock, my brain wasn't working properly but, I was still surprised by Keito. I have cried and clung to him before, and when I tried to hide I would definitely get caught, but I've rarely acted so listlessly before. The way I'm acting right now, even people besides Keito would be able to tell that something was wrong.

"Hey, Keito."

"Yeah, what?"

"Is there a way to catch a cold and sleep for four days during the school festival?"

".... What?"

He was making another rare, puzzled face. I often surprise or amaze him, but never like this, especially not over and over again. It was certainly a valuable expression.

I was about ten percent serious about what I said though. It wasn't really that crazy but, I really do want to crush my health somehow.

"... It's impossible... I think. Appointing a specific day is impossible, but first of all, Maria, you don't catch colds."

"Yeah, I thought so..."

"It's a different story if a cold is going around though... You've only ever caught a cold once right. And that was because you caught it from me."

I think that happened when I was around 6 years old. I had a very high fever so my memory is a little fuzzy, but I remember Keito being the first one to be stuck in bed. We were together every day, so I caught it. Apparently I was scolded by the doctor, and Keito came to apologize to me too.

I didn't mind at all though... I do remember him worrying too much about it. Besides, Keito was in elementary school so he probably caught it from someone there. Or maybe he got it from somewhere else. In the first place, I went and caught it on my own anyway.

Above all, thanks to that experience of my body breaking apart, I didn't have to go to Soleil-sama's birthday party... Though in the end I had to go to Runa's birthday party and had the worst encounter anyway.

Since that one time, I've never gotten sick again and have had a healthy body. Maybe it's because I didn't interact with other people much, so when Keito got sick in elementary school I ended up catching it. And so, because of that one time, Keito never let me come near him ever again if he was sick.

"Maybe I'll fake it."

"Faking something like that is impossible, right?"

"Uwaaaa...."

There's nothing I can do, I can't think of a single solution. If I can't rest in my room, then I have no choice but to withdraw... It seems like if I do, it'll get even more troublesome in the future.

Most importantly, all events conducted on campus are managed by the student council. There are people who handle the entrants but, the student council handles all information. The special feature of the culture festival is the contest so the names of the participants are definitely being leaked. So, my natural enemy is there. There's no way HE would let such an interesting development escape from him.

Furthermore, if I show an attitude where I don't want to appear in the contest, he would happily make plans to force me to appear. He's that kind of man. Someone who is familiar with the underworld would know exactly what people dislike. A person who knows pain can become kind, but that also means they know exactly what people hate after all.

So, if I act like I hate it in front of him and say it to him straight, there's no way I would be able to escape and he would definitely make me appear on stage. He would close all the doors and block every means of escape. No doubt.

"Seriously, what's wrong? What happened?"

".... It seems like... I'll be appearing in the Ozcon..."

As the words left my mouth, I could feel the despair within me grow.... Not saying it out loud was my final form of resistance. I had a little bit of hope that there was a possibility of it not happening. By the way, I am definitely not lucky.

Maybe the words that came out of my mouth weren't easy to understand. Keito still had a puzzled expression. I could see that he didn't seem to comprehend my words. I feel the same, seriously, I understand what you're feeling."

"Umm... Why?"

"That's what I want to know."

Chapter 91 It's Fine

Keio knew about my standing as Runa's fiancée candidate, so I summarized what had happened earlier to him.

I explained how I had thought it was cancelled, but it turned out that I was the favored candidate. And then, how I was challenged to a match in the bathroom. Everything superfluous about her... Her misunderstanding and how I ended up in the Ozcon.

I'm pretty satisfied by how brief I made my summary, but maybe I did throw in some unnecessary details. I'm involved in this, how could she not ask me for my consent...

It looks like my feelings were properly conveyed to Keito.

"I don't get her at all."

"Relax, I don't get her either."

"I can't find a single ounce of relaxation in me."

I can't help it. I just don't get her at all. Honestly, she was so odd, that I almost suspect it was a dream. It was supposed to be an announced attack, but I feel like a victim to a random attacker.

"Even though I turned down the recommendations... There was no point."

"Eh..."

"They asked me too... You know, Runa asked me. He told me to recommend you if you were fine with it."

No way, that's terrifying. Also, good job, Keito. As expected of my childhood friend. I didn't have to say anything and he understood. Seriously, thank you.

"Apparently there's supposed to be one candidate that is expected to win by a landslide. At this rate, she'll be sure to win, so he said to encourage you to enter."

"What's with that pressure!"

A candidate to win... That's probably Christine-sama. She is the poster girl for the drama club, so she has tons of fans. She's a beauty who can stand next to Runa, after all.

Having me compete with her... Was Runa really thinking? I sense that it was his childhood friend working in the shadows. It was definitely that guy's suggestion.

"I figured you'd hate it so I refused, but it looks like it was for nothing."

"Thanks... and sorry."

Even though he refused for me... Sorry, Keito. Wait, it wasn't like this was my fault, right? I did feel a small prickle of guilt though...

"It's not a big deal that I refused but... It looks like you ended up with something bothersome huh."

“Seriously...”

I can't even sigh anymore. My shoulders drooped and I massaged my temples, though there wasn't much of a point.

Let's pretend that it's fine I'm in a match. If I lose, becoming Runa's fiancée would be less likely... If I think of it like that, it's barely manageable.

However, the problem is the contents of the match. If I were the one deciding it, there wouldn't be any problems but... This time, the contest is based on appearances, and the audience will be voting for the winner. What should I do...? Is there nothing that can be done?

“It's hard to withdraw from things like this... The student council wanted you to enter, so you'll definitely pass the initial judging.”

Keito's words were very persuasive, as he had gone to elementary school before. That's why it's hard to look at the facts straightly.

“...!?”

“If you hate it that much then how about I talk to Runa?”

I sank into silence and then, he patted my head gently. Wait, he messed up my hair. Normally, my hair would get knotted easily but, my hair was tied up right now so it wouldn't get too messy. I didn't feel like protesting it today.

It wasn't any different than normal, but I understood the feelings behind it. The one who understands my troubles the most is Keito.

He won't treat me gently or spoil me, but there's no one who thinks of me more than Keito.

“... Thanks, I'm fine.”

“Yea, I know... We should return quickly or else we'll miss dinner.”

“Is it already that late... I wonder what's today's daily special.”

“Are the meals different depending on the dorm?”

“Hmm... They're probably the same.”

Keito spoke of the topic lightly. His tone was gentle without being persistent.

When I'm putting up a brave front, he doesn't try to give me advice, but when I'm lost, he properly makes a decision for me. If I say I'm fine, he believes in me. That's because he can see through my lies easily.

That's why, this time, as far as Keito is concerned, I'm fine.

If there's something that I can do, he believes that I'll do it. In other words, there's no one who can tell me “I'm fine” with more confidence than Keito.

With only that, all the hesitation and feelings of loss melted away.

“Seriously, I have such a good childhood friend...”

“Hmm...? What?”

“Nothing.”

After we separated to go to our respective dorms, I couldn’t think of any other counterplans in the end.

What should I do? What do I want to do? I didn’t know. It was thanks to Keito that I could sleep peacefully.

And then, after a few days, in the list of Ozcon participants, my name was there.

Chapter 92 I'd like to Advocate for My Privacy Rights

As expected, the little expectations I had were completely crushed on that day.

On a poster crammed full of notices, was a poster that held the information of the contestants. Their class, name, and even a picture... There was the picture of when Christine-sama was advertising for the drama club. Other contestants had pictures that drew out their charm points. Only my picture was like a normal ID picture. Yep, it was the picture for my student handbook.

"It's the beginning of hell..." (Maria)

"You're exaggerating."

"You're thinking it's someone else's problem!"

"Don't worry about it."

In contrast to me, who wanted to just grab my head and scream, Keito was calm as usual. I didn't want to go see the board alone because I might have gotten disheartened and started crying. It might have been better to have asked Primera and Eru instead. They would be kinder.

However, I don't want to talk about the match between Christine-sama and me. I don't think Primella or Eru would spread rumors, but I might become paranoid. This way, I can avoid feeling that way. After all, even walls have ears. I don't know where or when someone could be leaning against the wall eavesdropping.

"There are more contestants than I expected." (Maria)

"Yeah... Ten people, huh."

Even if I hadn't been selected, there would have been plenty of participants. Give me back my peaceful school festival!

I didn't recognize any of the names besides Christine-sama's, but as expected, all of them were beauties. Just by looking at the bulletin board, you could tell everyone was sublime. Right now, there were still some white spots on the poster, but they would soon disappear.

When I was contacted about the festival, I received numerous "necessities" handouts. I had thought, "what's necessary for a festival?" Reading through all of it would have been troublesome, so I just skimmed it.

One thing included was an artificial flower to be used for voting. Using the flower, students were supposed to stick it by the picture of the candidate they liked most to keep the voting results obvious. Students even bet on the contests. Of course, unofficially.

"As expected, Christine-sama will win overwhelmingly."

"She is the poster girl for the drama club... Though, this is my first time seeing her." (Keito)

The ten contestants had the same amount of space on the poster and it had just been put up. Even so, under Christine-sama's name, there were already red roses placed here and there.

“These flowers are really well made. They aren’t losing their shape at all.” (Keito)

That’s probably not the impression they wanted you to have. I had thought Keito was looking at Christine-sama’s face with a serious expression since it was his first time seeing her, but his gaze was actually directed towards the artificial flowers.

He was that impressed.

“Do you think I can keep this if I don’t vote?”

“They don’t plan on collecting them, so I think it’s fine.”

You’re not supposed to be wondering about that. As an adolescent boy, shouldn’t you be thinking of other things? Even though there are so many pictures of beauties lined up on the board... Or is that just my own bias?

I wonder if I should be reassured that he hasn’t changed at all.

“This will last a long time and the color is just like the real thing.”

“Come to think of it, you also tried making these sometimes.”

“I was only my dad’s helper though.”

Basically, Ikebana [flower arrangement with living flowers] is quite common, however, there are more instances where artificial flowers can be used. You can send it to people who are allergic, you can use it as permanent decoration, and so on. It can’t be helped that an imitation has more uses than the real deal sometimes.

“What are you going to do...”

“After the festival, I’ll give mine to you, too.”

“Ooh, thank you.”

Keito was acting as usual, so I found myself relaxing. Well, it’s within my expectations for him to be the same as usual... Although he was slightly different from what I thought it would be like.

Well, if Keito did become Christine-sama’s fan, I think I would have mixed feelings about it.

“As a contestant, what are you going to do?”

“We have a meeting with the contest committee.”

“Today?”

“After school.”

“Then, I’ll wait for you. There isn’t anything going on with the gardening club, as usual anyway.”

It seems like the gardening club has various things going on for the festival, but it’s mostly tending to the flower bed. It’s not different from what they normally do, well at least not for Keito.

I heard that they also decorated the arch for the festival but... It had the same feeling of usual. The gardening club has guts to do that. You could say they're cheeky.

"I'll just go to the flower bed then?"

"Yeah, the usual place."

"Got it."

After the meeting, I'll definitely be fed up the contest, but at least I'll be able to look forward to walking and talking with Keito afterwards.

Keito probably knew I'd feel that way, so he brought it up. I knew that Keito isn't as straightforward about being kind to me after all.

"Then, see you after school."

"Yeah, work hard in class."

"Maria, too... Don't sleep in class."

"I-I don't sleep!"

After tapping the area around my eyes a couple of times, he waved goodbye and turned to leave. I watched as his back grew further and further away before he finally rounded a corner. Then, I also rubbed the area around my eyes.

My eyelids felt heavier than normal, but my eyes weren't bloodshot, nor did I have dark circles under my eyes. My complexion wasn't poor and physical condition looked fine.

When I checked my face in the mirror this morning, I looked the same as usual.

"... Did he find out?"

That I couldn't sleep much last night.

Were the dark circles forming under my eyes now? Thinking they might have been, I took out my compact mirror to check. Do I look different from my picture... even though it was my own face, I wasn't sure.

"How'd he know..."

How does Keito see me? He really is mysterious. Maybe my attitude was different and I just didn't realize it, or something about me was different that I didn't notice.

In the end, no one else besides Keito pointed out my fatigue.

... How strong is Keito's sixth sense?

Chapter 93 Liking Something and Something Suiting You Are Different

After school meeting room... In this single room, you'd be smitten by the number of beauties lined up next to each other.

I'm not exaggerating, it was filled with Ozcon participants. In other words, the school's top ten beauties. I was embarrassed to be included as one of them... Modesty and humility are virtues I follow as someone with a Japanese disposition.

My appearance is Mariabell's so it could be worse... No, it's passable.

"-Then, that summarizes the contents of this meeting. Please have your costume sent to the waiting room a week before the contest."

The meeting was about the process of the contest and the clothes and accessories we should prepare.

The scale of this event was fearsome. You really can't make light of this school... It's a middle school beauty contest, but there will be order made costumes and stylists. I had thought that those things were special for Mariabell because of her money, but it looks like the whole school invests into this contest. Rich people becoming emotionally invested means their assets being used.

Honestly, just from learning about the contest procedure made me want to withdraw.

"Dress, hair, and make-up..."

It's a school festival so shouldn't we just wear the uniform... but, if I showed up in uniform, I'd probably be more conspicuous than if I wore a custom-made dress. Normally, I wouldn't care if I stood out like that but... I want to blend in with everyone else so I have to dress up at least a bit this time.

So, my hair and make-up would have to be elaborate. Maybe I could ask Primella? It would make me feel much better than asking an outsider to do it.

"As I thought, there were no problems with the contestants chosen by the Student Council."

"... Christine-sama."

"I wasn't too worried but... with this, the stage is set."

That's right, the stage. However, I, who would be standing on that stage, was not mentally ready. There's a storm happening in my head.

She looked beautiful walking towards me with the handouts in one hand. Seriously, if I overlooked her conversation topics, Christine-sama was as beautiful as a goddess. However, whenever she opened her mouth, my strength was shaved away. So, rather than a goddess, maybe she was actually a poisonous witch. I have to escape or else she'll drain all my energy.

"Beauty that you were born with is not the only thing you need for the contest. I'm looking forward to how you will fight the day of."

I'm not looking forward to it at all though. I'm actually hoping it's not too late to make up an excuse for why I can't participate and trying to think of other escape plans.

After saying what she wanted to say, Christine-sama turned around and left.

I've been thinking this for a while now but, there are a lot of "Ojou-sama" [noble young lady trope] types who don't listen to what other people want to say. Well, not like I can say anything. I'm not usually one to tell others my opinion straightforwardly. But, this time, I really wish she had listened to my opinion more.

Actually, anyone is fine. Someone please explain my position.

Christine-sama sees me as a fiancée candidate for Runa. In other words, she sees me as a rival. But is that true? Where did that information come from? If there's only one truth then shouldn't you consult the person in question first?

"Depressing..."

Plus, I have to prepare for the day of, how bothersome.

It looks like the days of my mental and physical strength being drained were beginning.

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For now, I planned to contact my parents to have them send me a dress I already owned.

They probably already know about the contest, but I wanted to relay that it was not necessary to make a dress. It was important for them to know that I did not plan on even trying to win this contest.

A lost battle... Match-fixing... It'd be a waste for me to put effort into this. I won't say that I want to participate in my school uniform, but I'm not desperate for a custom-made dress.

I only have the bare minimum amount of dresses at school, but I have a mountain of cute dresses at home. For someone without a fighting spirit, that should be plenty.

Mother will be disappointed but... She'll send me the dresses I asked for. I fully understand how much my mother enjoys dressing me up. Next time I go home I'll let her dress me up as much as she wants, so please forgive me this time.

"Okay, just my hair and make-up left... I guess I'll ask Primella?"

"Why me...!?"

"Out of the people I know, you're the best at it."

"You're only comparing me with Eru-chan right!?"

Is that an indirect way of saying that my only friends are Primella and Eru?

It's true. As expected, she perfectly understands my standing in our class.

"The other people are getting pros to be their stylists right? Why don't you do that too?" (Eru)

"What I want to do and what suits me are opposite."

“... Ah, I see.”

If I get a pro, the result will be wonderful. My appearance is already stunning, disregarding personal preference, anyone would agree that I’m a beautiful girl. My appearance is flashy, you can’t tell how old I am, though I have a sharp look in my eyes, it’s undeniable that I am beautiful.

So, if I left myself in the hands of a professional, I would definitely be transformed into a masterpiece.

Normally, that would be a great thing. On the battlefield, my appearance is my best weapon.

However, what I desire is defeat. If possible, I don’t want people to even remember I was there.

Normally, that wouldn’t be possible, but for this contest, dressing up is essential. No matter how high quality the base is, people won’t notice if it’s not spruced up for an event like this. Among ingredients that are all beautiful, one that is just slightly washed will be almost indistinguishable. No one would think that it could be superior.

“If you can just make it simple... I plan on picking a tidy dress, so I want my hair and make-up to be simple.”

The word “tidy” is just a nicer way of saying plain. As long as it matches my face it should be just passable... Actually, it might be tight around the neck and I could be very uncomfortable, but that’s that.

“Maria-chan, you’re asking me to do this and I want to help but... I can do your hair, but I can’t do make-up at all.” (Primella)

“... I also don’t know what to do about that.” (Maria)

I have technically lived many years, so it’s not like I don’t know the basics of make-up. But in no way am I well-acquainted with it, I’m definitely not skilled at it. At the very least, I think I know more about it than Primella.

Then wouldn’t it be fine if I just did it? I’m not bad at simple make-up, I’m probably quite skilled at it.

That’s what I had thought for a while. Ignorance really is scary.

“What kind of make-up is just right for this face...”

Translucent white skin, big eyes, long eyelashes. Cheeks that are slightly tinted pink and lips that are a glossy scarlet.

I was shocked when I looked in the mirror. Mariabell’s face doesn’t need any make-up.

If I knew more about make-up, I’m sure I could bring out more of her innate beauty though. If possible, I’d like to avoid using make-up. I certainly can’t attempt a risky attempt on a girl who doesn’t even need make-up in the first place.

Can't I just show up without make-up on... I can hear the devil whispering to me, but if I let my guard down, I know people will be gossiping about it. If I do this poorly, people will remember this match. Since I'll be appearing, I want to appear at least a little presentable.

"You're normally flashy but you want to be plain!? Isn't that absurd?" (Eru)

"Make-up is something that makes you stand out, after all..." (Primella)

Their sound logic stabbed me in the heart.

It's truuuee... Make-up is supposed to enhance a plain face. Beginners like us are more likely to put make-up on too thick and conspicuous. Using make-up to look plainer is a high level technique.

"Maybe I should ask a pro..." (Maria)

"Hmm... Ah, if you're going to, why don't we ask someone who'd know about it." (Eru)

"Know about it, you mean make-up?" (Maria)

"It can't be helped that we're all beginners. Maybe there's someone who knows more about it."

What Eru was saying sounded like the best idea. We weren't making much progress since we were all beginners. So, we should ask someone more knowledgeable to hasten my decision.

That's the best option but...

"But, do we know someone like that... People around our age haven't had many opportunities to use make-up yet, right?" (Maria)

We were pre-teens, it wouldn't be strange if someone had started to use make-up, but this is a school full of the rich and beautiful. On top of not needing make-up on a daily basis, if they did want a makeover, they would just hire a pro.

There wasn't a need for students to learn more about it or practice.

"There is someone in our class. Apparently, she is interested in it as a hobby. Of course, she doesn't use make-up on a daily basis, but I heard she likes collecting make-up tools and what not." (Eru)

"Heeeh..."

There was a girl like that... I had no idea at all. I've managed to remember all the faces of my classmates, but I didn't remember a girl into make-up. Well, I didn't mingle with students outside of school so that's natural.

"Maria, you've talked to her before, right? She's the girl that's with Saashia a lot." (Eru)

"Wha-?"

"Her name is Sara. You don't remember her?"

Chapter 94 Classmate

I remembered, I knew her. If I said I couldn't recall who she was, I'd be lying.

I'm talking about Sara Macleishia. She didn't appear much in the game, but currently, she often talked to Saashia. I have also talked to her a number of times.

It was true that she was cute and bright. When you saw her, she instantly gave off the impression of a normie. I could understand why she liked things like make-up.

"Speaking of which, I heard that Sara-chan also likes hair-styling. She has to get up early in the morning for class, so she doesn't do her hair elaborately, but apparently on days off she does her hair in a variety of styles." (Primella)

Was she the embodiment of girl power? Her appearance and her insides are too in sync. As someone whose appearance and insides don't match, I'm jealous.

"She's supposed to be able to do make-up. There's no harm in asking her, right?" (Primella)

"Yeah... I'll try asking her."

If I can, I'd rather not talk to more people about this, but this wasn't the time to be saying that. In order to decrease the chance of me winning, I must pick mediocre people over the elite. I don't know how skilled Sara was, but it's highly unlikely that a middle school student could beat a professional, right? As long as she's not a super talented genius at using make-up.

"I'll move with haste, I'll go now."

"Kay, take care~" (Eru)

"It would be nice if she helps." (Primella)

I waved good-bye and left my seat.

Sara was... probably with that guy right now.

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"Excuse me."

"Oh, Maria-san?"

I found her. As expected, Sara was next to that person. Saashia, who was tilting his head with his eyes wide open, was surrounded by several boys and girls., who all looked perplexed.

"I have something to ask Sara-san, is it alright if I borrow her for a bit?"

"Me?"

At my words, Sara pointed at herself and looked at me blankly. Our classmates became noisy with chatter. Maybe there were people who weren't even in our class, but I didn't know their names or class.

“Yeah, that’s fine! I’ll be right back.”

“Okay, see you.”

Her blank look was quickly replaced with a smile. She bounced up and stood next to me. The only one who spoke energetically was Saashia. The rest of the students were staring with a worried look on their face... It was probably just my imagination.

Seriously, sorry for the misunderstanding, but it wasn’t like I called her out to beat her up or anything. Please relax.

We walked a little until we reached a landing of stairs that was rarely frequented by students. I mostly talked to Kei or Cattleya-sama her, but there are plenty of other well-ordered facilities in the school.

“Umm... What did you want to ask of me?”

“Sara-sama, I heard that you were skilled at using make-up and doing hair.”

“I don’t know if I’m skilled, but... I like doing it. It’s like a hobby.”

“Well, I’d like to ask you to do my make-up for the cultural festival’s contest.”

“... Eh?”

Yeah, of course she’d have that kind of reaction. She would have been surprised even if a friend asked her, and I’m just a classmate, so of course she’d be surprised. Even though it was a custom to ask a professional, so asking a middle schooler student who does it as a hobby was... Huh, could it be, I just did something brash?

“Eh, eeeh!? M-me!?”

“Of course, I won’t force you to, so it’s fine if you decline but... If you don’t mind, I’d appreciate it.”

“That’s, umm, I’m happy but... Is it fine to not ask a pro? I learned it through self-study and I just do it as a hobby...”

“If I ask a pro, I don’t think they will follow my ideal image. I’d rather entrust this to a fellow classmate that I know.”

It wasn’t a lie. I just wasn’t saying the full truth.

I had asked Primella because she knew what I was really like. I didn’t want to look beautiful on stage, I just wanted to look like a slightly embellished middle school student.

Even by mistake, I didn’t want to win. A consistent hobbyist was much better than a professional for my purposes.

“... I understand. If you’re fine with me then... I’ll support you!!”

She blinked incessantly and she had her hands clasped in front of her chest. Perhaps it was to help her calm her nerves or perhaps it was to show that she had resolved herself in some way.

Whichever it was, she had arrived at a single conclusion. As proof, she stared straight at me, eyes filled with determination.

“I’ll make you exceptionally cute!!”

“Thank you.”

“Then, shall we talk about what kind of look you’re aiming for?”

It was helpful that she was quick to talk. However, if possible, please be less enthusiastic. It was just a cultural festival that was ridiculously large. Even if its budget was on par with a national level festival, in the end, it was just a contest for a school’s cultural festival.

“What kind of outfit will you be wearing?”

“I was planning on having several dresses delivered from my home. My only request is... to help me aim for a tidy image.”

A plain image. Also known as tidy if you were mature. I was planning on refraining from using too many ornaments and I wanted my make-up and hair to be simple. I would say it repeatedly, my goal was to be plain so I wouldn’t stand out. I wouldn’t be remembered nor even enter people’s line of sight.

“Tidy, huh... When your dresses arrive, can I see them?”

“Yes. They will be delivered to the waiting room, so when they arrive, I’ll bring you there.”

“Okay!”

Having finished our talk, we returned, side-by-side, back to the classroom. I wouldn’t say that I had made more friends, but it was a fresh feeling to have talked to a classmate like this. It had been quite some time since I had entered the school, so I felt that it was a little bad that it was my first time speaking to a classmate like this.

For now, I would just be glad that I had reached my goal.

Chapter 95 I Might Cheat

Dress, make-up, hair. Besides those three things... There's nothing else for contestants to do.

If they have money, students can hire workers. So, there isn't much physical labor for students to undergo. The committee is busy because they have paperwork to do, but contestants really have nothing to do. It's honestly kind of anti-climactic.

A contest is supposed to be more... focused on trying to appeal to the crowds. At least in my imagination. No, they probably are supposed to work hard more. Contestants are supposed to go to the cafeteria, terrace, and other places where tons of people gather, to smile and wave.

Nevertheless, before the voting started, Christine-sama had already pulled ahead. And, in second place, was me!

"What Christine-sama said was really true..."

For some reason she... Acknowledged my appearance, but even though I also think Mariabell's appearance is magnificent, I thought I was the type who wouldn't get votes from others.

Because, my appearance was flashy and extravagant. My eyes are sharp and my smile doesn't function like a smile. Rather than a beautiful girl, I'm like a beautiful woman, a villainess.

I was pretty, but I didn't have an appearance that people liked or admired. However, looking at these results, I could see that my understanding was wrong.

"Maria, you're becoming more aware, huh."

"It's hitting me hard."

I was glaring at Keito who didn't even glance at me. I thought I was being quite intense. Primella and Eru weren't used to my glare yet, so sometimes they still got scared.

People who don't feel guarded towards me are precious but... I feel like Keito has never been scared of me before.

"I think it's amazing. You didn't even advertise anything and you're already second place. Aren't you glad you have that face?"

"Can't you praise me better?"

"I wasn't praising you."

This guy... I seriously hit you one day. I'm a noble lady, so I can't right now but, I think I could just barely get away with a slap. We don't have much of a height difference right now, so I think I could get a good swing full of power in.

"You're the one who said you wanted to end this without standing out. How could you be happy that you're in second place?"

I always think again and again, this guy really understands. Keito was really slow with things related to other people, but when it comes to me, he was like an Esper.

But, just as Keito had said, I was hoping to be in last place but to be in second... just because of a photo... It's not what I wanted. If you understood that then console me!

"Do you think it's bad if I move the flowers to someone else's..."

"If you're going to do it I won't stop you, but do it on your own."

"If I get caught, then I'll drag you down with me."

"I'd run before that happened."

Of course, I'm not going to. It was just a joke, but I do want to do it. I don't think I'd get caught if I did it little by little... My apologies to the people who voted for me, but it's not too late! Please, move your flower to someone else. I won't mind at all!

"Do your best on stage."

"How?"

"... Make a weird face, or something?"

"I'll get yelled at."

"I'll laugh."

"I'm definitely not doing that."

Why is it harder to aim for last than for first place. Furthermore, I'm a candidate to win. How unfortunate. If I made a weird face on stage, there would definitely be complains thrown at me... Having a lot of things on mind is so bothersome.

"Well, if it continues like this, that upperclassman should win."

"That would be good but..."

To be honest, it's basically been decided that Christine-sama will be in the top rankings. The difference between her and I was basically, well, I don't think I could catch up. Third place onwards has no choice but to give up.

This means that the difference between me and third place was also quite large! I don't want to have to use my last resort, voter fraud.

"Ah, Mariabell-sama is here!!"

"Ts... Sara, sama."

"I was looking for you... Now... Ah, are you in the middle of a conversation?"

"No, it's fine. Did something happen?"

"I heard that your clothes arrived, so I wanted to go see them with you."

“Aah, come to think of it...”

They were just dresses I asked my parents to send, but they finally arrived to the waiting room. The people who were having their dresses order-made still weren't done. The only clothes in the waiting room were mine.

Father and mother were good at choosing dresses that suited me, but right now, I wanted a tidy one... In other words, one that didn't suit me at all. So, they had some trouble, and in the end, apparently Orseine-san picked them.

Come to think of it, I haven't checked them yet.

“Then, let's go together. Keito, see you later.”

“Yea.”

“Sorry for interrupting.” (Sara)

“Not at all, don't worry.” (Keito)

Keito just waved his hand at me, but properly replied to Sara... What a difference in treatment. His expression didn't change at all, but his choice of language was really noticeable.

We were originally close, so now he only says that much when we part.

“The waiting room is towards the club building.”

The waiting room was acting as a storage room until the day of the contest. The contest location was near Oz so of course the waiting room should be close by the venue, but it would be troublesome for Oz if we left our things there until the day of the event, but it would be troublesome for us if we had to bring our belongings from school the day of... So, they built a place just for this event to be shared equally between Oz and the school. The rich are amazing.

Therefore, the place we're going to right now, strictly speaking, is something like a temporary waiting room. Only a waiting room until the day of the event.

“I'm so excited... I didn't think I'd have anything to do with the Ozcon.”

“... like I thought. It's a big event.”

For a first year to be talking about it like this... Primella knew about it, too. Though, she only knew about it because it was so large.

When I think that I have to appear in such an event, my stomach starts to feel heavy.

“Eh...?”

“Nothing. It's this way.”

While holding my stomach down, I continued towards the clubroom building. My steps felt heavy... It was probably just my imagination.

Chapter 96 Avolition Syndrome

All the delivered dresses were white and had long skirts. They didn't have any special accessories and the skirts didn't have much volume. Rather than a fancy gown, they were more like simple one-piece dresses. Although, if you thought about the materials and cost, they were definitely fancy gowns. However, at a glance they looked plain. Just like I wanted.

Well, when Sara saw the dresses, she looked confused. She was comparing the dresses to me, over and over. Although she was smiling, it was obvious that she was troubled.

Yeah, I knew without her saying anything... The garments didn't suit me.

The clothes themselves were excellent. If Primella wore them, she would look splendidly cute, but I would be the one wearing them. It was rough with my villain-like face. It hurt me how much I understood that.

"Umm... Then, I'll think about a hair-style and make-up that will fit this dress!"

"Yes, please do."

Aah, I'm really sorry for asking you to do an absurd task.

Sara was probably thinking that I thought those clothes suited me, so she was trying to be considerate. Don't worry, I'm aware that they don't fit my image.

"Can I come here any time?"

"It's usually open afterschool. The school's security is flawless, but I don't think this place is being overseen as strictly."

"I see... Then, is it okay if I come here alone? I'd like to look at the actual dresses while brainstorming, if possible."

"That should be fine. Only the participants and related personnel are supposed to come and go as they please. I'll let them know that Sara-sama is helping me."

"I see, thank you!"

Fundamentally, this academy was peaceful. There were places that were minefields for me, but that was because of memories I couldn't forget when I was stuck in automode. For normal students, there wasn't a place on campus that was dangerous.

Security was always perfect after all. I had never even seen a suspicious person, a mouse, or even that black insect that starts with a "c."

For a huge event like the culture festival, I'm sure they have strengthened the defenses. This school would spare nothing to protect its students.

That's probably why I was careless. It wasn't just me, but the whole school who were only looking out for an attack from the outside. Excessive wealth was tied to self-confidence, so the school

was ready for a frontal attack, but not a sneaky person moving in the background. Only one person was wary, at least, I liked to think that.

Actually, if you harm others, then my wariness won't be deceived.

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The cultural festival preparations steadily progressed, before we realized it, it was only a week before the festival.

Even though my class wasn't supposed to be busy because we didn't have a program planned for the festival, my classmates who were a part of a club or committee always seemed so busy running in and out. There weren't many students who stayed in the classroom.

"Finally caught up~"

"Our class has a lot of especially busy people, huh. Normally, there aren't a lot of things for first years to do."

"Is it okay if those two don't go?"

Until the festival ended, there weren't any classes in session. There was self-study, but everyone was always running about here and there.

Since I was just a contest participant, I had a lot of free time. If I could, I'd like to switch places with someone. I'd run around as much as you'd like as long as I didn't have to appear in the contest...

"My club isn't particularly busy... Our senpai do a lot of work." (Eru)

"Me too. We just make things on our own." (Primella)

"Primella's club is putting on a display... Eru, what is your club doing again?" (Maria)

"... I wonder?"

"At least give me a hint."

I get how you feel though. When you have no work, you don't feel like participating. Especially since this school focuses more on supervision rather than physical labor, so there wasn't much more to do.

It was amazing that hopes and dreams could be turned into reality through the technical prowess of adults reproducing children's instructions. It was a magical world, but that wasn't much of a factor this time.

"There aren't many things for first years to do this year. It seems like this year is especially lacking work for us." (Primella, I think)

Looking around the classroom, the number of empty seats was more conspicuous. Saashia's gallery seemed to be very busy. Maybe in other classes, the first years weren't very busy, but at the very least, ours seemed to be busy.

Keito seemed busy every day too... Although it didn't seem like a large change, I felt like I shouldn't bother him. It was a childhood friend's sixth sense.

"Rather than us, is it okay for Maria to be relaxing?" (Eru)

"Eh?" (Maria)

"Something about contestants having to get together. I was talking to Sara this morning." (Eru)

"Ah..."

Everyone's garments have finally arrived, so we have to gather in the waiting room today. Depending on the dress, you may not be able to wear it on your own. Plus, hair and make-up would take time as well. Our order will be decided by taking that into account.

I heard about that this morning from Sara, it was my first time hearing that the order wasn't decided yet.

My lack of interest in the contest might be too much, even though I was the participant... I couldn't say anything about Eru.

"Class is almost over." (Maria)

"Oh my, is it already that late?" (Primella)

"Self-study flies by~" (Eru)

Our fun time ended before we knew it. Getting to chat with your friends during self-study was much more fun than attending class so of course it would feel short. Since you can work at your own pace, even the people who prepare for the next lesson or review the material probably feel like self-study ends quickly.

Well, they will have more time later, the self-study classes right now were only in name. They were just for students to have time to work on festival preparations.

"You two are going to your clubs now, right?" (Maria)

"Yeah, it's not class prep time anymore, but pre-time now. Even though there's nothing for me to help with, I just have to go." (Eru)

"Me too. Even though I'm just working on a personal project, it's best to be at the club."
(Primella)

"Do your best." (Maria)

"You too, Maria-chan." (Primella)

I... Don't want to work hard though...

My smile became dry from the thought, but thanks to the good timing of the bell, the conversation deviated away from me.

Chapter 97 Distant Memory

After class ended, we headed to the club room.

Primella went a different way, but Eru was with me until the middle. While we were walking in the hall, I remembered the time when we first met.

Come to think of it, have Eru and I been alone together before. There were times when Primella was separated from us a little, but it felt like we've never been completely alone together before.

"This feels pretty new~"

"Eh?"

"I mean, being together, just the two of us like this. It's been so long that it kind of feels weird"

Eru scratched her cheeks after saying that. It was a little embarrassing that we were thinking the same thing.

To be honest, the start of our friendship wasn't particularly wonderful. Since we re-conciliated, we haven't fought or quarreled, but our beginning was catastrophic.

Come to think of it, she said a lot of rash remarks... It felt like in our relationship, the depths of our pockets and our flexibility were very important.

"Honestly, I never thought we would be friends... Our first impressions of each other were bad."

"Actually, you had a good first impression."

"No way!? I don't know what I said, but I had a horrible attitude."

So she was self-aware... Ah, well, it was true it wasn't pleasant.

The time we met would never fade from my mind, it was a vivid and precious memory. If it weren't for that day, if we hadn't talked, we wouldn't be like how we were now and my heart would have deteriorated a little more.

"I'm used to people being on their guard... and I've been attacked more directly."

My face was, like this, but my outlook on the world was also very negative. In those days, I had less things to mull over, but there were a lot of problems. I can't do anything about the face I was born with, but it was my fault that I wasn't friendly.

"So, when you were being cautious of me, I thought it was natural and didn't think much of it. What I liked was... How much you treasured Primella."

Being vigilant towards me wasn't enough to make me dislike you. I believe it is your own freedom to do so. Of course, if you hated me baselessly, I'd be troubled, but as long as you didn't attack me, do as you like.

What was important to me was their relationship. Eru and Primella treasured each other, that's why when we passed each other, I thought that they were similar, yet different, from Keito and I.

Maybe it was because they were childhood friends of the same gender... Although, I feel like Keito and I have a unique relationship.

It wasn't the best method, but we did think of each other as childhood friends and acted as such. We could empathize with each other.

"I might've been the one that was more surprised. I didn't plan on it, but I ended up seeming like someone who wanted to fight... You really forgave a lot." (Maria)

"Aah... I did think, 'wow, this person says a lot of amazing things.'" (Eru)

Yeah, I'm really sorry about that.

Afterwards, Eru and I became a gossip topic. Apparently, I wanted to stand out, so I caused a grand show in front of many people.

There were a lot of rumors about me being a bad person, which was actually a blessing in disguise. Even without an objective point of view, it was the way I spoke that was the problem. The people who were around, were probably judging me.

When rumors like "Mariabell Tempest discriminates against commoners" circulated, no one pointed out that the contents of our talk were different from the rumors.

My childhood friend was even mentioned among the rumors, but he said, "don't worry about it. Monotonous things aren't remembered."

While the rumors were still circulating, we were getting along so, before we knew it, people forgot about the rumors. However, people remembered that I had a fierce personality. That was probably why I still haven't made friends with my classmates.

"In the beginning I was irritated, and I thought you were full of shit. I thought we would definitely be incompatible..."

Eru broke into a smile as she remembered that time.

Really, I understood that it irritated her, but I haven't the slightest idea how it was resolved after one day.

"After talking to Primella, I calmed down and thought about a bunch of things... I wondered if Maria was thinking the same things."

"The same...?"

"That you also had a precious person, that you were prepared for their sake."

For Eru, that was Primella, and for me, it was Keito.

The three of us really were similar. Two normal high school students, and the odd-ball me. What a strange mix.

We shared the feelings of having someone precious that we wouldn't give up.

"Maria and I, we have different ways of thinking but... If we have someone precious to us, we think it's fine to believe in them."

An impression based on appearances, and then acting out on the impression. Now, I feel embarrassed that I acted that way, but I think that was the correct thing to do at the time.

To Eru, nobles like Mariabell were an enemy that could hurt Primella.

However, even those nobles have people that are precious to them, I think they want to protect themselves.

It was funny how my initial negative impression had increased so much. It was like I was a delinquent that gathered stray dogs, was my first impression that bad? [When you see a delinquent be nice to a stray animal, your opinion of him goes up]

"I never thought our wavelengths would match so well... Even though our personality and interests are different." (Eru)

"The three of us are very different... But, when the three of us are together, it's fun and I like it." (Maria)

"Yeah, I feel the same. My prejudice against you has been smashed into pieces." (Eru)

"... I won't ask for the details." (Maria)

I'm... curious what kind of preconceptions she had, but it's definitely not something to talk about!

Seriously, is there anything I can do about my face? I love my father, but that's different from this situation. If I had looked a little bit more like my mother, I wouldn't have been forced into his contest. My mother is cute, but her looks aren't flashy enough to be in a contest.

"Ah, I'm going this way." (Eru)

Eru split off once we reached the club building. The waiting room was close to the club building, but it was in a completely different building.

"See you tomorrow."

"Yea, see you."

We waved goodbye and then headed our separate ways.

As I moved away from the from the hustle and bustle of the club building, the number of people around gradually decreased. It's natural since not many people were using the waiting room but... Little by little, I began to feel uncomfortable.

Since there weren't many people around, you wouldn't expect for there to be people gathered ahead.

"We're supposed to meet in the waiting room right..."

Eh, did I mishear something?

Like the time or meeting location. I was probably fine timewise since I came as soon as class ended, but maybe I got the place wrong... Eh, if we need to check clothes, then this should be right. However, I wasn't certain enough to say for sure. It felt like if I looked hard enough I could find an ex-convict.

Eventually, I saw the waiting room while I was thinking in circles. It looked like a beautiful building that people could reside in, it made me think about the cost whenever I saw it. As a commoner that was reborn as a noble, this was the thing that bothered me the most.

“Ah...”

As I drew closer, I saw that the door was slightly open. Although the clothes and accessories in the building were not of utmost importance, leaving the door opened was too careless.

Which meant that I hadn't misheard.

“Excuse me.”

Since I felt reassured that I hadn't been mistaken about the meeting location, I knocked on the partially open door and then opened it. I thought that there would be people inside so I properly said my greetings.

In the end, those weren't needed though.

“What is this...”

If it had been an unrelated person, they would have immediately gone to call for someone. They wouldn't touch anything and wouldn't enter the scene. Maybe they would even scream.

Unfortunately, I was directly involved and my mind went blank when I saw the room. Dumbfounded, I just stood there in shock.

It was right in front of the door, you would see it as soon as you entered.

Fluttering around was something white, maybe some sort of thread. Perhaps, it was cloth that had been torn to shreds.

My gaze fell on the mangled dress in front of me.

Someone, please explain what is happening to me, seriously.

Before my eyes was a beautiful light blue dress... At least, it had been. Honestly, I don't know if it was a prototype, but judging by the cloth and the fact that it was in this room, it was someone's garment.

“Eh... What is this...”

I couldn't say anything except “what is this” but seriously what's happening. It was as if I was denying the reality displayed before my eyes from the bottom of my heart.

I didn't care that no one was around... Well, if people were here, there's no way the scene would be like this.

For now, I'll move forward step by step to survey the damage. Somehow, all the dresses were in tatters except for one... Only my clothes were in one piece. Even my accessory shelf seemed to be untouched. Double checking my surroundings didn't change anything either.

I didn't know whose dress this was but... this definitely wasn't what it was supposed to look like. People are free to like whatever they please, but I don't think anyone would show up in these ruins for a contest.

I gathered the pieces that had fallen by my feet. The cloth showed no irregular signs of tear. It looked like it was cut by a sharp knife of some kind.

"This is..."

From what I saw, I could guess what had happened and why.

The skirt that was originally airy and flowy, was unfortunately crushed into pieces. Other garments and what support they had were completely disfigured.

—Only mine were unharmed. Then, what did I come here to do—

"This is bad..."

Once I realized it, I became pale.

I thought, "at any rate, I should get away from this place." So, I went to open the door.

My hand that had reached out to grab the doorknob... Grasped air instead.

"Ah, Mariabell-sama, you got here first...!?"

With the worst possible timing, Sara appeared.

She saw the expression on my face first and then when she saw the scene behind me, she stiffened. I could see that she wasn't digesting the situation very well. Her eyes were darting between me and the dresses.

"Um, Sara-sama... Actually—"

"What are you doing, just standing in front of the entrance?"

As soon as I tried to explain the situation, another person appeared with the worst timing. Christine-sama came in. It was reasonable for a contestant to come since it was a meeting for the contestants, but at least give me some time to explain what just happened.

"No one was entering so... Eh."

And, afterwards, the situation developed just as I thought it would. Among the people who were unable to understand the current situation, only I was calm. I calmed down since the amount of impatience had reached the ceiling of the room abruptly.

As the number of people entering increased, Christine-sama, who had understood the situation, turned to me with a grim look in her eyes.

“Can you explain what happened here...?”

Aaah, I knew it, I never should’ve taken part in this contest.

Chapter 98 A Mouth Like Miffy

When I had arrived, the door had been slightly open which made me think that someone was inside the room. However, when I had arrived, the room was already like this and I hadn't seen anyone suspicious.

I explained what had happened from the beginning to the end to the contestants that had gathered in the waiting room, as well as to a teacher that someone had called over.

I wasn't very good at explaining things, but I did my best. I tried to be as thorough as possible.

"So..."

"I understand your claim very well."

It wasn't a claim, it was the truth! It wasn't a lie but what had really happened, so please don't look at me like that.

"You were the culprit, right? Don't lie." Was written all over her face.

However, there wasn't any evidence that I was the culprit. Of course, because I didn't do it. They might not have agreed with my statement, but there wasn't anything else they could say.

"Chris-sama, are you okay?"

"It's impossible to make another outfit now..."

Oh yeah, it seemed like the garment that was in tatters was Christine-sama's. That was why she was so passionately suspicious of me.

It was pretty much decided that I would be second after Christine-sama in the contest. So, if Christine-sama's outfit was completely ruined, then of course people would be suspicious of the person in second. Which in this case, was me.

Furthermore, my clothes and accessories were still clean and untouched. Not a scratch or even a piece of dust on them. My things weren't order made, so they could have been anyone's, and yet they didn't have a mark on them.

Objectively speaking, I was very suspicious. This might get bad.

Though I said that, I couldn't afford to become flustered. I could imagine the situation escalating and becoming unbearably bothersome but, honestly, their doubts didn't bother me much. Sharp glares had been poking at me for a while, but I could ignore them.

Getting caught on a false accusation, I could see that happening at this rate. It was annoying that it could happen just because of suspicious, but it was such a situation. To summarize, it was a mess.

"If you're fine with mine, shall I lend you one?"

"Eh...?"

“They are things I owned previously, but they are clothes that are suitable for wearing to high society events. I had many sent over so that I could choose from them.”

Uwaaa, she was really glaring... I was trying to be careful though. Since she thought I was the culprit, everything I said probably sounded like a snide comment to her.

If I were the culprit, I would’ve attacked everyone’s clothes. Doing only one person’s clothes, furthermore, only my rival’s, was a stupid way to get caught. If you’re going to mess up the place, at least attack other people’s clothes at random! As a former villainess, whoever did this gets negative points.

Well, I also didn’t have a reason to do this and I couldn’t have aimed for Christine-sama’s dress in the first place.

Because, today was the first time I had seen Christine-sama’s dress. I didn’t even know what color it was, let alone what it looked like before it was ruined.

I didn’t say that since it sounded like a pathetic excuse... The clothes were probably labeled somehow.

“They were made for me so all we have to do is adjust the size.”

“... I guess that’s my only hope.”

With a sour expression on her face, Christine-sama reluctantly accepted. She really didn’t want to borrow from someone who she thought was the culprit, but it was impossible for her to have an appropriate outfit finished for the day of the contest. She could have clothes sent from her house, but neither she nor the school wanted to blow this incident out of proportion. If it went poorly, the contest could be cancelled.

In which case, Christina-sama didn’t have a costume. It wasn’t like it was prohibited to appear in a uniform, but it would certainly look out of place among custom-made dresses, in a bad way. Even if the raw materials were excellent, it was hard to beat showy figures in dresses.

Even a readymade dress, was much better than a uniform, even if it was borrowed.

“... Then, please. I will alter the size to a certain degree.”

“I have plenty, so please choose one you like.”

I had three dresses besides the one I would wear. None of them were particularly flashy, and their designs were tidy—er, plain.

They didn’t suit me but... They would match Christine-sama perfectly. She was the neat and tidy type of beauty after all. What’s with my clothes suiting someone else more than their owner?

This probably looked like I was trying to look better. If I really were the culprit, wouldn’t that mean I was dumb? That should be enough to prove my innocence, right? Though, if I said it, it would create unnecessary suspicious, so I won’t.

“Everyone, please keep today’s incident a secret,” the teacher said, just before the meeting was dissolved. Christine-sama also emphasized that afterwards. Neither wanted to escalate the situation. It could create more groundless suspicions and it would be dangerous if the culprit was provoked further.

There were many reasons, but it was better for them if rumors didn’t spread.

The next day, rumors that I had sabotaged Christine-sama had spread all around the school.

... Of course. People always talk.

Chapter 99 Privilege

Whispers here, whispers there. When I stand, everyone becomes silent; when I walk, stares follow. And, when I leave the room, the thoughts everyone was holding back are unleashed like a flood.

Well, it's been a hard day.

Who leaked the story? Has the whole school been playing telephone since yesterday? I didn't know how far the rumors had spread, but at the very least, the rumors were running rampant in my class. This is the worst.

Still, for my classmates who I have studied together with for month to be this suspicious of me... It hurts a little. My trustworthiness was as flimsy as a piece of paper.

Well, I understood their feelings. If it was... A normal classmate that just did not speak much, everyone would question the rumors at least a little bit.

However, this time, the center of the rumors were me. Furthermore, I was being pinned as the perpetrator.

No what I say, it would seem like I did it. My face made me look like that. If the perpetrator and victim were reversed, it would not have turned out like this. Mariabell being the victim just sounds fake.

"Maria-chan, are you okay?" (Primella)

"Yes... I'm sorry for getting you guys involved."

"Don't worry about it. I never would've imagined this would happen after you and I split up."
(Eru)

Normally during a break, we would stay in the classroom, but I felt extremely uncomfortable today, so we left. People's whispering and staring were bothersome.

Eru and Primella heard the rumors as well; I was surprised when they rushed at me this morning. As for the surroundings of my dorm, it was vulgar.

I was worried that they would doubt me after hearing the rumors, but my worries were unfounded. They were very worried about me and didn't think I was the criminal for an instant.

"Maria-chan would never do something like that." (Primella)

"I could see it if you fought in person, but you're no the type to do things sneakily." (Eru)

Primella's remark made me happy, but I felt like Eru was dissing me. Well, they had seen both sides of me, so I can't deny it.

"But... What happened?"

The two of them had heard the incident through the rumors, but I hadn't said anything to anyone since we had been told to keep the incident under wraps.

Actually, when I heard the rumors, I was surprised by how accurate they were. Except for the fact that I was the culprit.

People who didn't understand the meaning of "secret" blabbed so it seems like the story wasn't distorted much. It was barely within the limits of being just a rumor.

"If the culprit wanted to crush the leading contenders, it's weird that they just aimed at Christine-sama. Even if she withdraws, as long as Maria-chan is in the running, no one else will win."

"Well... That's true. That's probably why they made it seem like I was the culprit."

"Also, the meeting location... It was actually different, right?"

"Apparently."

On that day, after I heard from Sara that the meeting location was in the waiting room, they decided that everyone should meet elsewhere before going there. When Sara heard, she went back to the classroom to tell me, but Eru and I had already left. In short, we passed each other.

That's why everyone else besides me was together... That goes without saying. When I think about this, I feel like it was a trap set to frame me.

"Come to think of it, is Sara... Okay?"

"I wonder... We haven't talked since then."

I didn't know if she was suspicious of me, but everyone else was being blatantly disdainful so it was probably difficult to approach me. Maybe she will refuse to do my make-up now... That bothers me a little, but if that happens, I'll figure something out. I have never done it as Mariabell, but I do have some basic make-up knowledge.

"People lose interest quickly. As soon as the culture festival ends, everyone will forget."

I was worried that we were leaving a criminal that had framed me at large, but it was likely that if I recklessly pursued the culprit, the rumors would become even more vicious.

I didn't know if the culprit was actually trying to ruin Christine-sama, or denigrate me by using Christine-sama, or maybe even both, but if the contest ends, their goals will be fulfilled. My reputation would fall if left unpunished and Christine-sama would be unable to win.

Right now, what worries me the most is if by any chance, I defeat Christine-sama... The situation will worsen immensely.

"Haah..."

I was already dejected because of the contest, but now I was 80% more dejected.

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After school, there was only one place where I could escape from all of the stares and malicious gossip.

"Good work at school."

“I’m seriously tired...”

Keito thumped my head with the mug-bottle he was holding. It’s something used to carry around drinks for tea cups, but Keito doesn’t use it like that. It was too formal. I have the same one back in my room.

I was tired, so I took a gulp straight from the bottle. This would have been an issue for a noble lady besides me.

Honestly, I’ve been doing this since long ago. At home it wasn’t a bottle, but a normal cup, but I’ve been fine passing a cup around since I was young. Though, I wouldn’t do this with anyone besides Keito.

“Their stares are irritating, and I wish they would gossip somewhere I can’t hear. Or, just say it to my face...!”

“You’re going nuts.”

“Why am I the one that’s being considerate and staying away... Why can’t the ones gossiping and what not be more considerate!?”

“How about just letting them talk.”

“Well... Honestly, I’m not interested.”

“It’s about you though.”

‘Cause, I don’t really care. Go ahead and gossip somewhere I don’t know about.

It’s just that, if you’re going to do it near the person you’re talking about, just say it to their face. Then they can defend themselves or prove the rumors as false.

They should be the ones paying attention. Why was I the one hiding in an obscure flower bed where no one could hear me?

Seriously, if you don’t want someone to hear, then pay attention to your surroundings.

“Really, good work today.”

“Uugh...”

‘What do you want to do?’

“Stay here, sit next to me.”

“Understood.”

Keito gently patted my head after I let out a heavy sigh.

Since I complained out loud, I felt a little better... I wasn’t hurt, but I was sadder than I expected.

I didn’t mind much when I was with Eru and Primella. I had been calm and composed the whole time. Once I saw Keito, my frustrations overflowed, and I dumped them on him.

It wasn't that I didn't trust them, I had just been certain that I was fine... But it was a part of me that came out just for Keito.

"I'm behaving like a child..."

"It was a mistake to spoil you."

"Keito, do you spoil me?"

"Depending on the time and place."

I think I was being spoiled but... It was probably because I was relying on him and I didn't have it together. Since he was spoiling me, I'll permit his attitude.

"When you need to be scolded, encouraged, or comforted. Only when you need it."

I have thought this countless times, but Keito is a psychic. Furthermore, he actually got it right, so I don't think it's just my imagination, maybe he really is psychic.

"Maria, you're easy to understand and I'm good at sensing it. Even if I don't know in the end, you'll tell me directly."

"That's... You don't have to lie."

"I can figure it out in a second."

"Shut up."

Well, you always take care of me, thank you!

I drank everything in the bottle as revenge, but he just laughed at me. And then, he mouthed "idiot." It made me angrier than if he had said it out loud.

I wanted to make a rebuttal, but unfortunately, I couldn't think of one. I only had his mug bottle.

"... Keito, can you look that way?"

"Huh...?"

He tilted his head in confusion, but even so, he turned his back to me. Maybe it was true that Keito spoiled me.

I was happy that he turned without any caution, but I only had one aim. I undid the ribbon fluttering by his neck.

"Eh..."

"Don't look this way, stay still."

His hair was freed from the ribbon and fell around his shoulders. He really did have long hair for a boy. I was envious of his hair that stayed straight even though it had been tied up.

I held the cord between my lips while I did his hair. Then, I held it down with one hand as I tied it with the other. I wasn't good at this, but the result was quite excellent.

“Hm, finished.”

“What’d you do?”

“Fufu, I made you cute.”

“Huuh...?”

The only reason he tied his hair was to keep it behind his neck, so I tried a different style. As expected, this hair style suited him. The ribbon on his head was so cute that if someone saw him from behind, they might think he was a girl.

“You match me now.”

“Doing that... What’s wrong with you?”

“I couldn’t think of what to do as revenge, so I did a crime for fun.”

“That’s not something you should be proud of.”

“Fufu.”

He was exasperated with me, but I was satisfied.

I smiled proudly, causing Keito to laugh.

“Feeling better?”

“... Yeah.”

He nodded at me. This time, it seemed like Keito was the one satisfied. He raised his hand and ruffled my hair. Even though I told him to pat my hair in a way that wouldn’t mess up my hair many times, I was already feeling relieved.

Nothing was solved, but my heart felt brighter.